

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 13

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Dec. 20, 2025



SONNY BROCKWAY

MORE OF THE SAME — Ohio State heads into the College Football Playoff stewing after a 13-10 loss. Sound familiar? Those were the scores in the 2024 loss to Michigan and the 2025 Big Ten Championship Game vs. Indiana. The Buckeyes regrouped and won the CFP title last season and expect to do the same now.

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State is going into the College Football Playoff looking to win a national championship to prove that the 13-10 loss it suffered most recently was a fluke, and that it is the best team in the country.

If that sounds familiar, it's because the Buckeyes were facing an extremely similar scenario last season going into the College Football Playoff.

For the second straight season, the Buckeyes lost their final game before the playoffs began by the same score, although the circumstances are a bit different this time around.

Last year, the loss was a major upset against archrival Michigan that needed a soul-searching meeting between the players and head coach Ryan Day to climb out of the hole they had fallen into.

This year, the loss was to the No. 2 team in the country – with Indiana jumping to No. 1 after its win – and it was in the Big Ten Championship Game. It was the first Big Ten title game that Ohio State made it to since the COVID-shortened 2020 season, and the Buckeyes fell to just No. 2 in the country in the final CFP rankings, still securing a bye in the first round of the bracket.

Day said the day after the game, when the Buckeyes already knew their spot in the bracket, that even though the results of the

games right before the playoffs in the last two years might seem similar in some ways, that doesn't mean the two teams were in similar spots going into the CFP.

"Every year is different, and every situation is different," Day said. "This is one where we played against a very, very good team. It was No. 1 vs. No. 2, they were undefeated, and we feel like we sort of let it get away by not scoring late in the game."

Dropping only one spot in the final rankings and still getting a bye didn't make the loss any easier.

"(I'm) very disappointed overall with how we played," Day said. "We're all disappointed in the locker room that we didn't finish out this regular season the way we wanted to."

When it came down to it, the issues that showed up at points during the regular season were the same things that ended up hurting the Buckeyes in the conference title game.

Two times, Ohio State made it into the red zone and had third-and-1 plays that it was unable to convert. The first time, the Buckeyes tried a sneak with quarterback Julian Sayin on fourth down, after an incomplete pass on third down, and

despite him seeming to get the yards necessary, upon review, his knee was down before crossing the line to gain, turning the ball over on downs.

The fact that they were unable to convert the first time around influenced Day's decision not to go for it the second time they faced a fourth-and-1. Down three points with just under three minutes to go in the game, the head coach sent the field-goal unit out to tie the game up with a chip-shot 27-yard field goal.

But from the right hash, senior place-kicker Jayden Fielding shanked the ball left, never giving it a chance to get through the uprights, giving Indiana the opportunity to finish the game on its next drive, which soon-to-be Heisman Trophy winner quarterback Fernando Mendoza was virtually able to do with a 33-yard completion on third-and-6 that allowed the Hoosiers to run the clock down to 18 seconds.

Fielding's teammates aren't blaming him for the loss, especially since there were other issues the Buckeyes had.

"It's a team sport. It's not individualistic," defensive end Caden Curry said. "There's

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Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State fell to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 6, 13-10, losing its first game of the season and failing to capture its first conference title since 2020. Here are some choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves.

Sam Cipriani, BSB: For his dominant all-around defensive performance in the Big Ten Championship Game, I'm giving my Buckeye Leaf to defensive end Caden Curry.

The senior edge rusher racked up seven tackles (four solo), while leading the team with two sacks and three tackles for loss. Curry made his presence known from the jump, making a big hit on Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza

on the Buckeyes' first defensive play of the game.

His most impactful play came on third-and-7 in the first quarter, when Curry screamed off the edge to sack Mendoza and force a punt. Curry also added one pass breakup and one quarterback hurry.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: On a quiet day for Ohio State's offense, sophomore receiver Jeremiah Smith had a strong performance, earning my Buckeye Leaf. The Buckeye pass-catcher had a game-high 144 receiving yards on eight catches.

Smith's biggest play came on a 52-yard catch in the second quarter. On the play, Smith zoomed past Indiana cornerback D'Angelo Ponds to find himself wide open in Indiana territory. Redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin slightly underthrew his pass to Smith, but the star receiver created enough separation to still make

the catch. Smith then cut across the field and went 10 more yards to give the Buckeyes a first down at Indiana's 22-yard line.

It was the fifth time this year that Smith went for over 100 receiving yards in a single game.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to senior linebacker Sonny Styles, who had the second double-digit tackle game of his career with 12 stops against Indiana. The Buckeyes may have lost the game, but the defense was still its usual dominant self.

Styles was a major part of that, moving sideline to sideline throughout the game and making solo tackles when runners were making it into the second level.

Styles had seven solo tackles and added one quarterback hurry in the game.



From The Message Board

On Dec. 3, Ohio State offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline accepted an offer to be the head coach at South Florida. We asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to evaluate his time at Ohio State as a coach, how they believe he will do as a head coach and how they believe OSU will do at the wide receiver position moving forward. We also asked whether they believe Hartline taking a new job affected the offense in the Big Ten Championship Game.

"His time at OSU was fantastic! Yes, the timing of his taking the job had a negative effect on the offense vs Indiana. I have no idea how he will do as a head coach. His departure can't possibly help WR recruiting in the future at OSU."

— Terrier Buck

"His time at Ohio State was successful by any measure. High-ranked recruits that turned into some of the best WRs in Ohio State history and NFL first-round picks. However, you also must give credit to the Ryan Day offenses that featured some very, very good QBs. Without great offensive game planning and very accurate QBs, you don't get the stats that these WRs obtained. It was a combination of events, Hartline leaving, a big win over Michigan, and poor execution that affected our results in the B1G Championship. He will do OK. Ohio State will get the WRs they need because we have Ryan Day, 'The Quarterback Whisperer' as head coach!"

— BuckeyeScott

"I think Hartline had a fine impact on OSU. I couldn't always tell who was calling the plays, though. Too many cooks in the kitchen. The timing for taking the USF job was not so hot, but I think he will be a

fine coach. I hope he thrives. As for the fate of the WRs, I'm not worried. As Shakespeare would say, they are stamped by nature, born to be great. Onward."

— PeyoteBuck

"Hartline's time at OSU as a player, coach, recruiter, and OC was exemplary. We were outplayed in the BIG championship game; not Hartline's fault. I think he will be successful as a head coach. WR recruiting will not suffer. However, the WR position will be very good at USF."

— R1TBDBITL

"Hartline is an excellent coach. Year in, year out, he brought in great receivers. Just look in the NFL. There were lots of factors impacting the Big Ten Championship Game, Hartline leaving being only one. He will do fine as a head coach. He has been involved with great programs and has learned a successful system. Now he must learn the rhythm of the game with play-calling. As for receivers, we will still get great receivers because we always have outstanding quarterbacks that can thread the needle. Coach Day is a great QB coach and usually an exceptional play-caller. We will be fine."

— John Lanning

"I think Brian Hartline was tremendous as a wide receivers coach at Ohio State. The greatness of Hartline's receivers was an integral part of Ryan Day's passing attack. I also thought Hartline was underrated as a play-caller this year. The Buckeyes ran their offense at a slow tempo, but they have been very efficient this season.

"It's hard to say how much Hartline taking the USF job impacted the offense against Indiana. It seemed to me that the Buckeyes' offensive line was simply outplayed by the Hoosiers' front. I don't really think Hartline is to blame for that.

"I think Hartline will do very well as a head coach. He's an excellent recruiter, and as long as he hires a quality staff, I expect USF to consistently contend for American Conference championships. I expect Ohio State's receivers to be not quite as good as they were under Hartline, but I still think that position group will be one of the best in the country going forward."

— Bobby Gorbett, BSB

"Hartline was arguably the best receivers coach in the nation for years. In his first full season as play-caller, he was solid, outside of Ohio State never truly being able to unlock

its run game.

"One-hundred percent, I believe him taking the job impacted the Big Ten championship. I still am worried about the disconnect between him and the offense going forward, with him missing so much time to get operations sorted in Tampa. If I'm Ryan Day, I'm taking over the play-calling for the CFP.

"I think it's going to take Hartline some time to develop before he figures out his way of being a head coach. He has only spent three seasons, in part, acting as co-OC or OC before taking a jump to be a Group of Five head coach. That's a big jump. I do feel he can be a strong culture builder and has the offensive mind, so he has the tools to be a good head coach. It just may take a couple of years to hit his stride.

"If I'm a top wide receiver prospect in high school and my options are to play for Hartline at USF or Day and Ohio State, I'm choosing the Buckeyes. I believe Ohio State will be just fine. Hartline certainly helped, but like Day said to Chris Henry Jr. to secure his commitment: It's Ohio State that develops first-round wide receivers as a collective, not just one individual."

— Sam Cipriani, BSB

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OPINION

Can Indiana's Success Be Sustained?

How is it that Indiana, a football program that has lost more games at the major college level than any other, was prescient enough to find itself a genius of a head coach who had spent much of his career in the lower divisions of the NCAA?

Curt Cignetti was never the guy on everyone's radar whenever a vacancy occurred at the Football Bowl Subdivision level. He won a bunch of games during a six-year tenure at Division II Indiana University of Pennsylvania, had a couple of nondescript years after he moved on to Division II Elon, and then presided over five successful years at James Madison during which that program made the transition from the Football Championship Subdivision to FBS competition.

Still, most major college programs seek the up-and-comers of the coaching profession rather than someone like Cignetti, who was 62 when he was announced as the head coach at Indiana. Sometimes referred to by former assistants and players as a "cocky nerd," Cignetti has transformed what once was a perennial doormat into a bona fide powerhouse.

In just two years, Indiana has achieved things once thought impossible in Bloomington – its first Big Ten championship since 1967 and first outright title since 1945, its first-ever No. 1 national ranking and its first-ever Heisman Trophy winner.

Cignetti also engineered his program's first victory against Ohio State since 1988, ending a 30-game losing streak in the series by utilizing a lockdown defense to exploit weaknesses in an otherwise potent Buckeye offense while offering just enough offense to secure a 13-10 victory in the Big Ten Championship Game.

The 180-degree turnaround by the Hoosiers has been accomplished largely with a roster remade through the transfer portal. No fewer than 40 underclassmen left the program through the portal when Cignetti arrived, attrition the new coach addressed by welcoming in nearly 30 new transfers, including a dozen who followed him to Bloomington from James Madison.

Before this season began, nearly two dozen more transfers joined the Indiana program, including newly minted Heisman Trophy quarterback Fernando Mendoza.

The formula Cignetti is using is obviously a successful one, but is it sustainable in a conference that features some of the marquee programs in college football? The secret to success at such places as Ohio State, Oregon and USC, and even at Penn State and Michigan, who are undergoing messy coaching changes, remains a solid base of recruiting and developing high school talent and then plugging holes at positions of need through the transfer portal.

A few years back, Michigan State made a big splash when second-year head coach Mel Tucker overhauled his roster through the portal and guided the Spartans to an 11-2 season and their first top-10 finish in the national rankings in six years. Whether Tucker would have been able to sustain that success was rendered moot when he was fired less than two years later amid allegations of sexual harassment.

Colorado head coach Deion Sanders rarely leaves campus on recruiting visits, preferring to retool his roster through the portal. That worked in 2024 when the Buffaloes went 9-4 (their best record since 2016) and featured Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter, who had followed Sanders from Jackson State.

But this season, with Sanders battling health problems, Colorado lost its final five games to finish with a 3-9 record.

It will be interesting to see how Indiana – now playing the role of the hunted rather than the hunter – navigates its way through this year's

College Football Playoff, especially without star defensive lineman Stephen Daley, who suffered a season-ending leg injury while high-fiving fans following his team's victory against Ohio State.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Even more interesting to watch will be how Cignetti and his program fare in 2026 and beyond.

Always A Bridesmaid

It seems the prevailing thought about this year's Heisman Trophy race is that Mendoza clinched the award when Indiana was victorious against Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship Game. I would contend the IU quarterback clinched the trophy three weeks earlier with his last-second touchdown pass to a toe-tapping Omar Cooper Jr. to pull out a 27-24 win at Penn State.

Statistically, it wasn't much of a performance from Mendoza, who completed 19 of 30 attempts for 218 yards, a touchdown and a costly interception that forced his team into come-from-behind mode. But when one-man hype machine Gus Johnson of Fox Sports screamed, "Give him the Heisman Trophy now!" into the microphone, the race was all but over.

It was a superlative year for quarterbacks with Mendoza, OSU's Julian Sayin and Diego Pavia of Vanderbilt racking up record numbers. As the regular season came to a close, Sayin had the most passing yards (3,323) as well as the highest efficiency rating (182.14) and completion percentage (78.4) while Mendoza had the most touchdown passes (33) and Pavia had the most combined passing and rushing yardage (4,018).

Perhaps Sayin, who finished fourth in the final balloting, was downgraded for being a one-dimensional quarterback. For all of his on-target throwing, he was actually something of a liability in the run game – minus-2 yards and no touchdowns through 12 regular-season contests and the conference title game. If the Buckeyes are to make a run at a second straight national championship, Sayin might have to prove he can tuck and run on occasion.

The OSU quarterback might also have had votes peeled off by teammates Jeremiah Smith and Caleb Downs, who finished sixth and ninth, respectively, with a combined total of 106 points. (Don't get me started on how Smith – acknowledged by most pundits as the best college football player in the nation – garnered only four first-place votes.)

This season marked the seventh time in the past eight years that at least one Ohio State player had finished among the top 10 Heisman finalists. The streak began in 2018 when Dwayne Haskins finished third in the balloting. A year later, Justin Fields, Chase Young and J.K. Dobbins each placed in the top six.

Fields finished seventh in the 2020 voting, C.J. Stroud was fourth in 2021 and third in 2022, and Marvin Harrison Jr. had a fourth-place finish in 2023.

Somewhat strangely, the only season among the last eight in which no Ohio State player finished among the top 10 Heisman vote-getters was 2024 when the Buckeyes won their most recent national championship.

Still, during the 50-year period since Archie Griffin won the second of his two awards, Ohio State has had only two Heisman winners – Troy

Smith in 2006 and Eddie George in 1995.

Some Final Thoughts

Just how coveted is a college football national championship trophy? Obviously, it's the *raison d'être* for nearly every athlete, coach and administrator.

Sometime around 2020, the University of Michigan football program decided that it had chased a national title long enough. Head coach Jim Harbaugh and some of his assistants allegedly devised a way to steal their opponents' signs and used that information along with a talented roster (especially on defense) to go undefeated in 2023 and celebrate the program's first title since sharing one in 1997 and its first undisputed national championship since 1948.

Then the bill came due.

Harbaugh, who has steadfastly denied knowledge of any wrongdoing despite being suspended for six of his team's 15 games that season, ran off to the NFL one step ahead of a 10-year "show cause" penalty from the NCAA. Assistant Connor Stalions, the supposed mastermind behind the sign-stealing scam, received a "show cause" penalty of eight years while fellow assistant Sherrone Moore got two years of "show cause" plus a couple of game suspensions.

The university's athletic program was also assessed a \$30 million fine – certainly not the kind of harsh punishment some had advocated but hardly a slap on the wrist.

Through it all, Michigan and its fan base have largely dismissed the scandal as sour grapes on the part of its rivals, continuing their cavalier attitude toward rule-breaking by not only promoting Moore to head coach following Harbaugh's departure but rewarding him with a five-year, \$27.5 million contract. Not bad for a guy still in his 30s whose closest brush with running a program was as assistant head coach at Central Michigan in 2017, a season in which the Chippewas posted an 8-5 record.

We know now that Moore was wholly unprepared for the burning hot spotlight that accompanies being head coach at Michigan. But because he had faithfully served Harbaugh, kept his mouth shut about what he knew about the sign-stealing scandal – despite being suspended for destroying evidence – and presided over a fourth straight victory against Ohio State in 2024, Moore enjoyed a degree of job security.

Even when the coach's affair with a female staff member became more and more apparent in Ann Arbor, no one said a word. Even when that staff member received a healthy bump in salary on Moore's recommendation, the status remained quo. Only until the staffer broke off her relationship with Moore and exposed the affair to the authorities at Michigan did the university terminate the coach's contract.

What transpired afterward featured a young man's life spiraling out of control to the point of criminality.

To be sure, Michigan is not the only college program to have its warts exposed. From Woody Hayes through Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer, Ohio State has incurred more than its share of embarrassment. Whether slugging an opposing player in the heat of battle, signing NCAA documents you knew to be false or obfuscating knowledge regarding misdeeds of one of your assistant coaches is comparable to a cheating scandal that continues to claim victims is for someone else to decide.

I only know that history books are full of stories regarding unbecoming behavior, stories usually made worse when constantly denied.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Sayin Finishes 4th In Heisman Race

After a stellar season in his first year as Ohio State's starting quarterback, Julian Sayin fell just short of winning the Heisman Trophy. Sayin, who was one of four Heisman finalists, finished fourth in Heisman Trophy voting behind Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza, who won the award on Dec. 13, Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia and Notre Dame running back Jeremiah Love.

Ohio State's redshirt-freshman quarterback threw for 3,323 yards, 31 touchdowns and six interceptions while completing 78.4 percent of his passes, the highest completion percentage in the country.

Sayin was considered a front-runner to win the award, given to the best player in college football, throughout much of the end of the regular season. However, after Ohio State lost to Indiana 13-10 in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 6,

Mendoza was the overwhelming favorite to win the award.

Although Sayin fell short of winning the prestigious Heisman Trophy, he was the first Buckeye to be a finalist for the award since Marvin Harrison Jr., who also finished fourth on the ballot in 2023.

Sayin has also received several other honors after leading Ohio State to its first 12-0 regular season since 2019. He was named to the All-Big Ten second team, he was the Big Ten Freshman of the Year, and he also earned multiple second-team All-America nods.

Downs Wins Thorpe, Lott Awards

Downs was named the best defensive back in the country when he won the Thorpe Award on Dec. 12, announced at the "College Football Awards Show" on ESPN.

Downs is in his second season with the Buckeyes and has been a big part of the No. 1 defense that OSU has boasted in both years. Last year, the Buckeyes gave up a nation-best 12.9 points per game, including the four-game College Football Playoff run. This year, the unit has improved so far by giving up 8.2 points per game.

Downs has been crucial to that success as the third-leading tackler on the team, tied with defensive end Caden Curry's 60 stops. Downs has been very good in the open field, with 40 solo stops, and has also added five tackles for loss and one sack.

He has helped the Buckeyes remain

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	W, 14-7	FOX	9-3, 27-17 win over Texas A&M
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	W, 70-0	BTN	7-5, 28-27 loss to Southern
Sept. 13	OHIO	W, 37-9	Peacock	8-4, 31-26 win over Buffalo
Sept. 27	at Washington	W, 24-6	CBS	9-4, 38-10 win over Boise State
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	NBC	7-5, 17-7 win over Wisconsin
Oct. 11	at Illinois	W 34-16	FOX	8-4, 20-13 win over Northwestern
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	W, 34-0	CBS	4-8, 17-7 loss to Minnesota
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	W, 38-14	FOX	6-6, 40-36 win over Rutgers
Nov. 8	at Purdue	W, 34-10	BTN	2-10, 56-3 loss to Indiana
Nov. 15	UCLA	W, 48-10	NBC	3-9, 29-10 loss to USC
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	W, 42-9	FOX	5-7, 40-36 loss to Penn State
Nov. 29	at Michigan	W, 27-9	FOX	9-3, 27-9 loss to Ohio State
Dec. 6	Indiana*	L, 13-10	FOX	13-10 win over Ohio State
Dec. 31	Miami (FL) or Texas A&M#	7:30 p.m.	ESPN	
* Big Ten Championship at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)				
# Cotton Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals) at Arlington, Texas				

first in the country in passing yards allowed, with just 129.1 per game.

The junior has also had two interceptions this season, broken up two passes and has hurried the quarterback once.

Downs is the third Buckeye to win the Thorpe Award in its history after being a finalist last year. He is the first since Malcolm Jenkins in 2008 and also joins Antoine Winfield, who won the award in 1998. The only other programs that have had three players win the Thorpe Award are Texas, LSU and Oklahoma.

Downs was also awarded the Lott IMPACT Trophy on Dec. 7, which honors the top defensive player in college football based on on-field performance, academic achievement, community involvement, leadership and character.

The safety was a finalist for the award in 2024, though the honors ultimately went to Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter of Colorado. This season, the Buckeyes' junior captain earned the honor over Georgia linebacker C.J. Allen, Miami (Fla.) defensive end Rueben Bain and Texas Tech linebacker Jacob Rodriguez.

Downs was also a finalist for the Bednarik Award but was not named the winner.

10 Bucks Named All-Americans

Ten total Buckeyes earned Walter Camp, Associated Press or American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) All-America honors following the 2025 college football season.

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2025 Big Ten Individual Award Winners

Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award: Will Shields, Nebraska
Ford-Kinnick Leadership Award: Jack Campbell, Iowa
Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year: Fernando Mendoza, Indiana
Nagurski-Woodson Defensive Player of the Year: Caleb Downs, Ohio State
Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year: Julian Sayin, Ohio State
Hayes-Schembechler Coach of the Year (coaches vote): Curt Cignetti, Indiana
Dave McClain Coach of the Year (media vote): Curt Cignetti, Indiana
Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year: Fernando Mendoza, Indiana
Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State
Ameche-Dayne Running Back of the Year: Emmett Johnson, Nebraska
Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year: Kenyon Sadiq, Oregon
Rimington-Pace Offensive Lineman of the Year: Carter Smith, Indiana
Smith-Brown Defensive Lineman of the Year: Kayden McDonald, Ohio State
Butkus-Fitzgerald Linebacker of the Year: Arvell Reese, Ohio State
Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year: Caleb Downs, Ohio State
Bakken-Andersen Kicker of the Year: Nico Radicic, Indiana
Eddleman-Fields Punter of the Year: Ryan Eckley, Michigan State
Rodgers-Dwight Return Specialist of the Year: Kaden Wetjen, Iowa

Ohio State wide receivers Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate, linebackers Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles, defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, quarterback Julian Sayin, defensive end Caden Curry, offensive linemen Luke Montgomery and Carson Hinzman, and Downs each earned All-American honors.

Smith, Downs, McDonald and Reese earned first-team honors from all three organizations, making them consensus All-Americans with the chance to be unanimous if they are featured on The Sporting News and the Football Writers' Association of America All-America teams. McDonald, Reese, Styles and Downs

have all played vital roles along each of their respective defensive units. McDonald ranks fifth on Ohio State with 57 tackles and is fourth on the Buckeyes in both tackles for loss (eight) and sacks (three). He also had recorded a team-high two forced fumbles.

Reese has skyrocketed into talks for the No. 1 overall pick in the upcoming 2026 NFL draft after a 62-tackle, 6½-sack season where he has served as a game-wrecker for Ohio State's defense.

Tate, who earned a nomination on the AP's second team, has been dominant alongside Smith this season, ranking second on Ohio State with 48 catches for 838 yards and nine touchdowns.

Styles was also named to the AP's second team after leading the Buckeyes with 80 total tackles. The senior linebacker has added a forced fumble and an interception.

Sayin earned Walter Camp second-team honors and was on the AP's

third team. Curry was also awarded Walter Camp second-team honors and an AP third-team nod. The senior defensive end leads Ohio State with 16½ tackles for loss, a mark that ranks 14th nationally. Curry is also tied for sixth in the FBS with 11 sacks on the season.

Hinzman received first-team recognition from the AFCA along with McDonald, Reese, Downs and Smith, while Luke Montgomery, Curry, Tate and Sayin were all on the second team.

Patricia Finalist For Broyles Award

Ohio State's first-year defensive coordinator, Matt Patricia, was named a finalist for the Broyles Award on Dec. 11. The award is given annually to the top assistant coach in the country.

Patricia joined the Buckeyes over the offseason after the departure of former

Continued On Page 6

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

The thought of Ohio State meeting Brigham Young in the Florida Citrus Bowl had Dylan Thomas licking his chops.

"It's excellent," said Thomas, executive director of the Florida Citrus Bowl, of the matchup of the Big Ten Buckeyes and the BYU Cougars of the Western Athletic Conference. "There's a general consensus in the area, and probably around the country, that this could be one of the best matchups of any bowl this side of the Orange Bowl. Few can match this one.

"The offensive prospects of BYU in the game is going to be a highlight for a lot of people," continued Thomas. "Then again, Ohio State is not exactly without its own weapons. It should be a good, high-scoring ballgame."

Were Thomas and his fellow committee members pleased to land the Buckeyes in their game?

"In three letters, y-e-s. Absolutely," Thomas said. "We set our goal at the front end of this football season that we wanted a Big Ten team in our game. I don't think we would have preferred any other than Ohio State."

35 Years Ago — 1990

Seeking a postseason victory for the first time since the 1986 season, Ohio State was set to travel to Memphis, Tenn., on Dec. 27 to take on unranked Air Force in the 32nd annual Liberty Bowl.

The Buckeyes, ranked 24th in The Associated Press' final regular-season poll, sported an 11-11-0 record in bowl games but had not posted a bowl victory since a 26-12 win over Texas A&M in the 1987 Cotton Bowl.

OSU earned its trip to Memphis by virtue of a 7-3-1 record, a mark which included a string of five consecutive victories in Big Ten play. The Buckeyes missed out on a shot at the Rose Bowl when they dropped a 16-13 verdict to archrival Michigan in the regular-season finale.

Despite the fact that the Buckeyes missed their shot at the Rose Bowl, head coach John Cooper said the team had dedicated itself to making an excellent showing at the Liberty Bowl.

"We will go to Memphis and we will have some fun, but we will also take care of business," Cooper said. "I think every team which gets invited to a bowl game should consider itself fortunate. There are a lot of teams out there that don't get to go anywhere.

30 Years Ago — 1995

Even the prim and proper crowd in the Heisman Room at the Downtown Athletic Club got into the act.

"Eddie, Eddie!" the crowd chanted.

No, this wasn't Ohio Stadium, and, no, this wasn't a dream – although it was the fulfillment of Eddie George's boyhood dreams. George had just been named the 61st Heisman Trophy winner as the nation's most outstanding college football player on Dec. 9 in New York City.

"I'm glad this is over," George told the distinguished group at the DAC and a national television audience on ESPN.

OSU's "big number 27" as Cooper had frequently referred to him, became the school's sixth Heisman Trophy winner and its first since Archie Griffin won back-to-back Heismans in 1974 and '75.

25 Years Ago — 2000

Cooper had twice before predicted that his team would win a

postseason bowl game. He and the Buckeyes delivered on that promise against BYU in the 1993 Holiday Bowl, but they came up short against Florida State in the Sugar Bowl after the 1997 campaign.

Speaking at OSU's postseason banquet two days after his team's season-ending loss to Michigan, Cooper was not in the mood to make a grandiose prediction – especially since his team's Outback Bowl opponent from the SEC had not been named yet.

But he did express extreme hope that the Buckeyes would prevail, saying "Nine-and-three sounds good to me.

"Our players are excited to play in a Jan. 1 bowl game," he said. "It doesn't matter if you are playing South Carolina and Lou Holtz or Tennessee or LSU. You're not going to play a bad team from the SEC in a Jan. 1 bowl game."

20 Years Ago — 2005

A 25-21 comeback against Michigan not only earned Ohio State a share of its 30th Big Ten championship, but thanks to a handful of upsets around the rest of the country, the team's fantastic finish to the season paid a rather unexpected dividend.

The Buckeyes finished fourth in the final Bowl Championship Series standings, earning an automatic bid into the big-money BCS, and got the cherry on top with a dream matchup against Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl, set for Jan. 2 in Tempe, Ariz.

"Coming from where we were after (losing to Penn State earlier in the season), I'm not sure things could have turned out any better," said senior linebacker A.J. Hawk. "Getting in a BCS bowl – obviously we wanted to do that – and then playing someone like Notre Dame just makes it a little more special."

The Buckeyes would make their fourth appearance in the eight years of the BCS and their third in the last four at the Fiesta Bowl.

15 Years Ago — 2010

Eight days after Ohio State wrapped up the 2010 regular season with another victory against archrival Michigan, the Buckeyes learned their postseason fate. The team that finished 11-1 and earned a share of a record-tying sixth straight Big Ten title would have the chance to put to rest a streak that had dogged the program since the days when Woody Hayes patrolled the sidelines.

When they suited up on Jan. 4 to face 10-2 Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl, the No. 6 Buckeyes would have an opportunity to earn their first-ever bowl victory against a team from the Southeastern Conference. Nine OSU squads before them had tried and failed, a statistic that had been almost impossible to escape in recent seasons.

That proved to be true even inside the team's meeting room at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. When the Buckeyes assembled on Dec. 9 after having been off since the win against the Wolverines, they were greeted with an e-mail that head coach Jim Tressel claimed to have received.

"Some guy actually sent us something in the mail about Ohio State, how we're so bad and whatever," said senior linebacker Brian Rolle. "That motivates me as a captain, as a senior, as a starter here – to let the guys know that this outing is going to be different from the past."

10 Years Ago — 2015

The year before Urban Meyer came to Columbus, Ohio State lost seven games. The Buckeyes hadn't lost that many in the four

years since.

In a season that began with the highest of expectations and saw an incredibly talented Buckeye team stumble at the worst time, remembering that fact and the perspective it brings was worthwhile.

Meyer had won 49 games in his four seasons at Ohio State, dropping just four, but his stated goal was to win championships in November. A loss to Michigan State on the 21st of that month – Meyer's first November loss with the Buckeyes – made that impossible in 2015, in turn ensuring the team would not have a chance to play for the ultimate championship in January and defend its 2014 College Football Playoff championship.

"This is an exceptional group that came up a few seconds short in a game against a really good team, obviously," Meyer said. "Finish what you start. What are we, 11-1? Find a way to get our 12th win. You win 50 games for four years, that's pretty outstanding."

Five Years Ago — 2020

Almost everything the Ohio State football program does is in preparation for the annual rivalry game against Michigan. The Buckeyes had a clock inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center that counted down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until their next meeting with the Wolverines, and a period during every practice focused exclusively on the Maize and Blue.

So, to say the coaches and players were disappointed to learn on Dec. 8, just four days before The Game was scheduled to take place, that it was canceled due to a coronavirus outbreak within the Michigan program would be an understatement.

"I'm tired of giving this team bad news," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said during his weekly radio show on Dec. 10. "You just don't get that kind of news and move on. There's just been so much invested in that game throughout the entire year. All the time and every day, we honor this game."

At the same time, Day recognized the Buckeyes could not afford to dwell on the situation because two major goals – winning a Big Ten title and a national championship – were still in front of them.

One Year Ago — 2024

Even though the players and coaches knew that they were locked into a playoff spot despite the stunning 13-10 loss to Michigan on Nov. 30, the question of moving forward after such a crushing blow was a hard one for the players to grapple with immediately after.

"I'm not really sure right now," said fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon when asked how the Buckeyes could come back from the loss. "It's frustrating for all the seniors, all the older guys. We're just going to have to lick our wounds and regroup, but I don't think anything has hurt more than this."

Now the Buckeyes had no choice but to move on, something that became a little easier when they had something real to look forward to rather than just the idea that they would have a playoff game somewhere, against someone.

On Dec. 8, Ohio State was seeded No. 8 in the College Football Playoff and was matched up against No. 9 Tennessee, allowing the Buckeyes to play in the first-ever postseason game in Ohio Stadium. From that point on, it was all about the Volunteers.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

DC Jim Knowles, who left to go to Penn State. The hire was met with skepticism, but Patricia has proved the doubters wrong in a big way, leading one of the best units in the country.

Ohio State's defense is still first in the country in scoring defense despite losing to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game, and it is also first in total defense, giving up 213.5 yards per game.

He led the unit to four first-team All-Big Ten selections, with McDonald, Reese, Styles and Downs earning the honor. Curry and cornerback Davison Igbinosun were named to the second team, while cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. was third-team.

The winner of the Broyles Award will be announced on Feb. 12, with voters deciding between Patricia, Indiana defensive coordinator Bryant Haines, Georgia offensive coordinator Mike Bobo, Miami (Fla.) defensive coordinator Corey Hetherman and Texas Tech defensive coordinator Shiel Wood.

Jackson, Smith Reach 1,000 Yards

The Big Ten Championship Game certainly didn't go as Ohio State hoped, but a couple of its skill position players reached single-season milestones. In the loss to Indiana, Smith reached over 1,000 receiving yards on the season for the second straight year, while freshman running back Bo Jackson made it over 1,000 rush-

2025 All-Big Ten Football Teams

Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media. **Ohio State players are in bold.**

Coaches Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE:

QB – Fernando Mendoza, Indiana
RB – Emmett Johnson, Nebraska
RB – Kaytron Allen, Penn State
WR – **Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State**
WR – **Carnell Tate, Ohio State**
WR – Makai Lemon, USC
C – Logan Jones, Iowa
OG – Beau Stephens, Iowa
OG – Emmanuel Pregon, Oregon
OT – J.C. Davis, Illinois
OT – Carter Smith, Indiana
TE – Kenyon Sadiq, Oregon
TE – **Max Klare, Ohio State**

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE:

DL – Derrick Moore, Michigan
DL – Anthony Smith, Minnesota
DL – Tyrrique Tucker, Indiana
DL – **Kayden McDonald, Ohio State**
LB – Aiden Fisher, Indiana
LB – **Arvell Reese, Ohio State**
LB – **Sonny Styles, Ohio State**
DB – Louis Moore, Indiana
DB – D'Angelo Ponds, Indiana
DB – **Caleb Downs, Ohio State**
DB – Dillon Thieneman, Oregon
DB – Bishop Fitzgerald, USC

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:

K – Sean O'Haire, Maryland
P* – Ryan Eckley, Michigan State

Returner – Kaden Wetjen, Iowa
LS – Mark Langston, Indiana

OFFENSE HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS:

Josh Gesky, Luke Altmeyer; INDIANA: Roman Hemby; IOWA: Hayden Large, Kade Pieper, Kamari Moulton; MARYLAND: Alan Herron, Dorian Fleming; MICHIGAN: Andrew Marsh, Andrew Sprague, Jake Guarnera, Marlin Klein; MICHIGAN STATE: Jack Velling, Nick Marsh; MINNESOTA: Jameson Geers; NEBRASKA: Luke Lindenmeyer, Rocco Spindler; NORTHWESTERN: Caleb Komolafe, Evan Beernsten, Ezomo Oratokhai, Hunter Welcing; **OHIO STATE: Tegra Tshabola, Will Kacmarek**; OREGON: Alex Harkey, Dakorien Moore, Dante Moore, Isaiah World, Jamari Johnson, Jordon Davison, Noah Whittington; PENN STATE: Drew Shelton, Khalil Dinkins, Nolan Rucci; RUTGERS: Ian Strong, Kwabena Asamoah; USC: Alani Noa, Ja'Kobi Lane, Justin Tauanuu, King Miller, Tobias Raymond, Walker Lyons; WASHINGTON: Carver Willis, Demond Williams Jr., Jonah Coleman.

* - additional honorees due to ties

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:

Julian Sayin, Ohio State
Bo Jackson, Ohio State
Antwan Raymond, Rutgers
Omar Cooper Jr., Indiana
Elijah Sarratt, Indiana
KJ Duff, Rutgers
Iapani Laloulou, Oregon
Luke Montgomery, Ohio State
Olaivavega Ioane, Penn State
Caleb Tiernan, Northwestern
Austin Siereveld, Ohio State
Lake McRee, USC
Lance Mason, Wisconsin

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:

Gabe Jacas, Illinois
Caden Curry, Ohio State
Aaron Graves, Iowa
Bear Alexander, Oregon
Rolijah Hardy, Indiana
Jimmy Rolder, Michigan
Bryce Boettcher, Oregon
Zach Lutmer, Iowa
Jalen Huskey, Maryland
Robert Fitzgerald, Northwestern
Davison Igbinosun, Ohio State
Brandon Finney Jr., Oregon

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:

Nico Radicic, Indiana
Bryce McFerson, Maryland
Jack McCallister, Purdue
Jonathan Brady, Indiana
Luke Basso, Oregon

DEFENSE HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS:

Dylan Rosiek, James Thompson Jr., Matthew Bailey, Miles Scott, Tomiwa Durojaiye, Torrie Cox Jr.; INDIANA: Amare Ferrell, Isaiah Jones, Mikail Kamara, Stephen Daley; IOWA: Karson Sharar, Koen Entringer, Max Llewellyn; MARYLAND: Cam Rice, Daniel Wingate, Dontay Joyner, Jamare Glasker, La'khi Roland; MICHIGAN: Brandyn Hillman, Ernest Hausmann, Jaishawn Barham, Jyaire Hill, TJ Metcalf; MICHIGAN STATE: Jordan Hall; MINNESOTA: Deven Eastern, Kerry Brown, Maverick Baranowski; NEBRASKA: Andrew Marshall, Ceyair Wright, Dasan McCullough, DeShon Singleton, Javin Wright; NORTHWESTERN: Josh Fussell, Michael Kilbane; **OHIO STATE: Jaylen McClain, Kenyatta Jackson, Lorenzo Styles, Tywone Malone**; OREGON: Jadon Canady, Matayo Uiagalalei; PENN STATE: A.J. Harris, Amare Campbell, King Mack, Zakee Wheatley, Zane Durant; PURDUE: Charles Correa, Tahj

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:

Jayden Maiava, USC
Justice Haynes, Michigan
Jordan Marshall, Michigan
Hank Beatty, Illinois
Griffin Wilde, Northwestern
Denzel Boston, Washington
Pat Coogan, Indiana
Gio El-Hadi, Michigan
Dave Iuli, Oregon
Gennings Dunker, Iowa
Trevor Lauck, Iowa
Riley Nowakowski, Indiana
Max Bredeson, Michigan

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:

Teitum Tuioti, Oregon
Dani Dennis-Sutton, Penn State
Rayshaun Benny, Michigan
A'Mauri Washington, Oregon
Mac Uihlein, Northwestern
Mani Powell, Purdue
Mason Posa, Wisconsin
TJ Hall, Iowa
Xavier Nwankpa, Iowa
Zeke Berry, Michigan
Koi Perich, Minnesota
Jermaine Mathews, Ohio State

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:

Ryon Sayeri, USC
Gabriel Nwosu, Penn State

Kenneth Williams, Nebraska
John Ferlmann, Ohio State

Ra-El; RUTGERS: Bo Mascos, Jett Elad; UCLA: Andre Jordan Jr., Gary Smith III, JonJon Vaughns; USC: Anthony Lucas, Devan Thompsons, Eric Gentry, Kamari Ramsey; WASHINGTON: Alex McLaughlin; WISCONSIN: Christian Alliegro, Ricardo Hallman.

SPECIAL TEAMS HONORABLE MENTION:

ILLINOIS: Hank Beatty; IOWA: Drew Stevens; MICHIGAN: Dominic Zvada; MINNESOTA: Tom Weston; NEBRASKA: Jacory Barney Jr.; NORTHWESTERN: Jack Olsen, Luke Akers; **OHIO STATE: Brandon Inniss, Jayden Fielding**; OREGON: Atticus Sappington; PENN STATE: Nicholas Singleton, Ryan Barker; PURDUE: Spencer Porath; RUTGERS: Jai Patel; UCLA: Will Karoll; WASHINGTON: Denzel Boston; WISCONSIN: Vinny Anthony.

ing yards for the year.

Smith, who became the first freshman receiver in Ohio State history to go for over 1,000 receiving yards, is the second player in program history to go for 1,000

receiving yards in back-to-back seasons. Harrison, a two-time unanimous All-American, was previously the only other receiver to accomplish the feat, doing so in 2022 and 2023.

Jackson, meanwhile, became the fifth freshman running back in Ohio State history to reach the 1,000-yard mark. He joins Robert Smith, who gained 1,126 yards in 1990, Maurice Clarett (1,237

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FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE:

QB – Fernando Mendoza, Indiana
RB – Emmett Johnson, Nebraska
RB – Kaytron Allen, Penn State
WR – **Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State**
WR – **Carnell Tate, Ohio State**
WR – Makai Lemon, USC
C – Logan Jones, Iowa
OG – Emmanuel Pregnon, Oregon
OG – Olaivavega Ioane, Penn State
OT – Carter Smith, Indiana
OT – Gennings Dunker, Iowa
TE – **Max Klare, Ohio State**
TE – Kenyon Sadiq, Oregon

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE:

DL – Gabe Jacas, Illinois
DL – **Caden Curry, Ohio State**
DL – Tyrique Tucker, Indiana
DL – **Kayden McDonald, Ohio State**
LB – Aiden Fisher, Indiana
LB – **Arvell Reese, Ohio State**
LB* – **Sonny Styles, Ohio State**

DB – D’Angelo Ponds, Indiana
DB – **Caleb Downs, Ohio State**
DB – **Davison Igbinosun, Ohio State**
DB – Dillon Thieneman, Oregon
DB – Bishop Fitzgerald, USC

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:

K – Nico Radacic, Indiana
P* – Ryan Eckley, Michigan State

Returner* – Kaden Wetjen, Iowa

LS – Mark Langston, Indiana

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:

Julian Sayin, Ohio State
Jordan Marshall, Michigan
Antwan Raymond, Rutgers
Omar Cooper Jr., Indiana
Elijah Sarratt, Indiana
KJ Duff, Rutgers
Pat Coogan, Indiana
Beau Stephens, Iowa
Luke Montgomery, Ohio State
J.C. Davis, Illinois
Isaiah World, Oregon
Riley Nowakowski, Indiana
Lake McRee, USC

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:

Derrick Moore, Michigan
Anthony Smith, Minnesota
Aaron Graves, Iowa
Bear Alexander, Oregon
Rolijah Hardy, Indiana
Jimmy Rolder, Michigan
Bryce Boettcher, Oregon

Amare Ferrell, Indiana
Louis Moore, Indiana
Jalen Huskey, Maryland
Zeke Berry, Michigan
Koi Perich, Minnesota

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:

Sean O’Haire, Maryland
Bryce McFerson, Maryland

Kenneth Williams, Nebraska

John Ferlmann, Ohio State

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:

Dante Moore, Oregon
Roman Hemby, Indiana
Bo Jackson, Ohio State
Hank Beatty, Illinois
Ja’Kobi Lane, USC
Denzel Boston, Washington
Carson Hinzman, Ohio State
Kade Pieper, Iowa
Tegra Tshabola, Ohio State
Phillip Daniels, Ohio State
Austin Siereveld, Ohio State
Jack Velling, Michigan State
Lance Mason, Wisconsin

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:

Teitum Tuioti, Oregon
Dani Dennis-Sutton, Penn State
Rayshaun Benny, Michigan
A’Mauri Washington, Oregon
Isaiah Jones, Indiana
Ernest Hausmann, Michigan
Mac Uihlein, Northwestern
Amare Campbell, Penn State
TJ Hall, Iowa
Zach Lutmer, Iowa
Robert Fitzgerald, Northwestern
Jaylen McClain, Ohio State
Brandon Finney Jr., Oregon

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:

Drew Stevens, Iowa
Tom Weston, Minnesota
Jack McCallister, Purdue
Jacory Barney Jr., Nebraska
Jonathan Brady, Indiana
Greg Tarr, Michigan

Djabome; UCLA: Andre Jordan Jr., JonJon Vaughns, Rodrick Pleasant; USC: Devan Thompkins, Eric Gentry, Kamari Ramsey; WASHINGTON: Alex McLaughlin, Ephesians Prysock, Tacario Davis; WISCONSIN: Christian Alliegro, Darryl Peterson, Mason Posa, Mason Reiger, Ricardo Hallman.

SPECIAL TEAMS HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Hank Beatty, Lane Hansen, David Olano; IOWA: Rhys Dakin; MARYLAND: Ethan Gough; MINNESOTA: Alan Soukup; NORTHWESTERN: Luke Akers, Jack Olsen; **OHIO STATE: Brandon Inniss;** OREGON: Gary Bryant Jr., Luke Basso, Atticus Sappington; PENN STATE: Ryan Barker, Gabriel Nwosu, Nicholas Singleton, Tyler Duzansky; PURDUE: Luke Raab, Michael Jackson III, Spencer Porath; RUTGERS: Jakob Anderson; UCLA: Salem Abdul-Wahab, Mateen Bhaghani; USC: Hank Pepper, Ryon Sayeri; WASHINGTON: Denzel Boston; WISCONSIN: Vinny Anthony.

Final CFP Rankings

Rk.	Team	Record
1	Indiana	13-0
2	Ohio State	12-1
3	Georgia	12-1
4	Texas Tech	12-1
5	Oregon	11-1
6	Ole Miss	11-1
7	Texas A&M	11-1
8	Oklahoma	10-2
9	Alabama	10-3
10	Miami (Fla.)	10-2
11	Notre Dame	10-2
12	BYU	11-2
13	Texas	9-3
14	Vanderbilt	10-2
15	Utah	10-2
16	Southern Cal	9-3
17	Arizona	9-3
18	Michigan	9-3
19	Virginia	10-3
20	Tulane	11-2
21	Houston	9-3
22	Georgia Tech	9-3
23	Iowa	8-4
24	James Madison	12-1
25	North Texas	11-2

Game, Indiana coach Curt Cignetti had high praise for Day and his program. During an availability on Nov. 30, Cignetti said Day will end his career as a legend.

“They’re a great football team,” Cignetti said of the Buckeyes. “Obviously, they won the national championship last season and have won multiple national championships. Ryan Day’s a great coach. He’ll be one of the legends of the game someday.”

Cignetti, who avenged one of Indiana’s only two losses in 2024 during the Big Ten Championship Game, was also praised by Day for turning the Hoosiers around. Under Cignetti’s guidance, Indiana has made back-to-back appearances in the College Football Playoff on the heels of going 3-9 under former head coach Tom Allen in 2023.

“I think the first thing is, he’s adapted to modern times,” Day said of Cignetti. “He certainly has taken a roster and turned it over quickly and brought in some really talented players, so I think that’s the first thing. It’s about talent acquisition. And

Continued On Page 8

Cignetti Calls Day
A Future Legend

Ahead of the Big Ten Championship

yards in 2002), J.K. Dobbins (1,403 yards in 2017) and TreVeyon Henderson (1,248 yards in 2020). Jackson is the 28th running back in Ohio State history to run for over 1,000 yards in a single season since 1960.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 7

the way that we used to do that was just recruit and develop, and that takes time. He's been aggressive, and he's been able to turn over his roster and bring in a lot of talent in a short period of time, which is really well done."

Curry Tops PFF Ratings Against IU

Despite the loss, Ohio State had several players receive high marks from Pro Football Focus for their respective performances against Indiana. Curry was Ohio State's highest-graded player. After going for two sacks in the Buckeyes' narrow loss to the Hoosiers, Curry received a grade of 85.6. McDonald was Ohio State's second-highest graded player. The junior defensive tackle received a grade of 77.3 after totaling five tackles.

Smith and Tate were Ohio State's high-

est-graded offensive players. Smith, who led the team with eight catches for 144 yards and a touchdown in the loss, received a grade of 75.1, while Tate received a grade of 72.9 after going for four catches for 45 yards and a touchdown.

Sophomore linebacker Payton Pierce (36.1) and junior tight end Bennett Christian (47.6) were the lowest-graded Buckeyes.

No Buckeye Sports Bulletin Print Edition Mailed Until Jan. 13

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the Jan. 17, 2026, edition, is scheduled to be mailed on Jan. 13. That issue will contain coverage of the Cotton Bowl and the Fiesta Bowl, should the Buckeyes win their New Year's Eve matchup, as well as a preview of the national championship if Ohio State advances.

With so many potential games and so few BSB print issues to cover them, don't forget that the BSB staff will be covering all the action, including complete game coverage, daily at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers. This would also be a great time to jump on the Forum, as the discussion between readers and the BSB staff is bound to be lively.

And remember, the complete edition of each print BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon publication. This is a great stopgap measure for those of you who are continuing to have mail delivery problems, while your paper winds its way through the postal system.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The

Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff reports on the breaking stories plus posts additional features. This is also where you can find the latest recruiting news.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays.

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DC Knowles Headed To UT From PSU

Penn State head coach Matt Campbell, who was hired by the Nittany Lions on Dec. 8, decided not to retain Knowles on his staff next season.

Knowles, who was Penn State's defensive coordinator during the 2025 season, accepted the same position at Tennessee, signing a three-year deal with the Volun-

teers, where he will earn an average of \$2.2 million per year.

After this season, Penn State was set to owe Knowles more than \$7 million on the two years left on his deal with the Nittany Lions. The figure for the defensive coordinator's potential buyout is yet to be negotiated.

Knowles joined former Penn State head coach James Franklin's staff just six



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days after winning the national championship with Ohio State in 2024. Franklin was fired halfway through the season after getting out to a 3-3 start, but Knowles finished out the year, helping lead Penn State to a 6-6 record in 2025.

Despite bringing a championship pedigree to the Nittany Lions, Knowles and the Penn State defense struggled throughout the season, finishing significantly worse in most statistical categories than the year prior.

In 2025, Penn State ranked 34th in total defense (334.3 yards allowed per game) and 37th in scoring defense, allowing 21.4 points per game. Comparatively, in 2024, the Nittany Lions had the seventh-ranked total defense (294.8) and the eighth-best mark of 16.5 allowed.

Prior to his time at Penn State, Knowles spent the previous three seasons as the defensive coordinator for Ohio State and previously held the same role at Oklahoma State from 2018-21. He also

spent 2010-17 as Duke's defensive coordinator.

Knowles has had only one stint as a head coach, earning a 26-34 record with Cornell over six seasons from 2004-09.

OSU Involved In Three Highest-Rated Games

The eyes of the college football world were often cast upon the Buckeyes this season. According to data gathered by Nielsen, Ohio State was involved in each of the three most-watched college football games in 2025. Ohio State's win over Michigan was the most-watched game of the season, drawing an average of 18.42 million viewers. The Game had a peak viewership of 20.54 million viewers.

The Big Ten Championship Game had an audience of 18.3 million viewers, making it the second-highest viewed game of the college football season, while the Buckeyes' Week 1 matchup against Texas was the third-highest viewed game of the

season. The 14-7 triumph over then-No. 1-ranked Texas had 16.3 million viewers.

Henderson Earns NFL Honors

Henderson was named Offensive Rookie of the Month after multiple strong performances throughout November with the New England Patriots.

Patriots starting running back Rhamondre Stevenson went down with a toe injury in New England's final game of October, and Henderson has since taken over the backfield.

Henderson racked up nearly half of his season total rushing yards in just four games in November, earning 330 yards on the ground while tacking on 13 receptions for 81 yards.

The former Buckeye's month was highlighted by a 14-carry, career-high 147-yard, two-touchdown performance in New England's 28-23 win over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Nov. 9. Henderson also

combined for 93 rushing and receiving yards as well as three total touchdowns against the New York Jets the following week.

Overall, this season, Henderson has taken 143 carries for 773 rushing yards and seven touchdowns on the ground. The first year back has also added 34 catches for 212 yards and one receiving score.

Henderson became the second former Buckeye in a three-month stretch to be named the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Month, joining wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, who earned the honor in September.

Henderson helped New England, which started just 1-2, to 10 straight wins and an 11-2 start before losing to the Buffalo Bills on Dec. 14. It marked the Patriots' best start to the season since 2016, when New England finished 14-2 before marching through the playoffs to claim Super Bowl LI over the Atlanta Falcons, 34-28, in overtime.

Bucks Use Break To Get Healthy, Improve

Continued From Page 1

more plays the defense could have made, and there's more plays the offense could have made, more plays on special teams that could have been made. It's not one person that defines the game. Nothing's wrong with Jayden. I'm not going to put it all on him. There's no need for that."

The offensive line also struggled. At times this year, the front five had issues with run blocking, and that was an aspect of the troubles it had on Dec. 6. But the usually stout pass blocking also faltered against a powerful Hoosiers front seven.

Sayin was sacked five times in the game after being brought down just six times over a full 12-game regular season prior to playing Indiana.

"The major lesson for this team is that it can come down to one play, two plays or three plays that decide a game like this," Day said. "This is a tough lesson to learn, but we have to be more efficient across the board."

In terms of what else might have affected how the Buckeyes played that game, it was an unusually busy week outside of usual game-week preparation.

Not only did Ohio State need to prepare for what was the No. 2 team in the country, but the early signing period was right in the middle of the week, for three days from Dec. 3-5, which became an extended event due to offensive coordinator Brian Hartline accepting an offer to become the head coach at South Florida the morning of the first day of the signing period.

When Hartline took the job, not only did multiple wide receiver recruits put off their signings to look at other options, along with one flipping away from the Buckeyes, but the OSU offensive coordinator's attention was taken off the Buckeyes during usual game-prep time, which Hartline admitted after the fact.

"Frankly, I would say last week was the hardest week, just with the amount of things

that were moving and being pulled away and all of these things," said Hartline on Dec. 8 in his introductory press conference in Tampa, Fla. "Once we get through this week, we have a little bit of time to get back to take a breath, get organized and then be able to operate a little bit from afar and also be cleaner there. I'm going to feel a lot better moving forward than last week. Last week was a tough week."

Day clarified that, despite not being fully focused on the Big Ten championship, Hartline still called plays in the game, and he would continue to do so, moving forward through the playoffs. Day did note that it would likely be much easier to prepare with nearly a month between games.

With the loss, the Buckeyes missed out on playing in the Rose Bowl for the second straight season since the Big Ten champion Hoosiers took that spot, but the No. 2 seed still secured them a spot in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 31.

Day thinks the long break will also help in other ways.

"I want to get the guys healthy," he said. "I want to get them rested, physically, mentally and emotionally. There's a lot of guys hurting after that game. But you have to wake up and move on and figure out how to get those things fixed, but not so much that we lose our edge."

Sayin said in the week following the game that the experience the Buckeyes had last year, losing to Michigan and coming back to win the national title, will be helpful this year since they know it's possible to do so.

Day agreed and said that any issues that caused OSU to lose would be addressed in the time leading up to the Cotton Bowl.

"We're going to respond like men," Day said. "We're not going to sit around and point fingers and feel sorry for ourselves. We lost. We were not at our best. You have to get the issues fixed. The red zone was one of them, the balance on the offense and there's certainly some things that the guys



FILE PHOTO

ON THE ATTACK — Coach Ryan Day said the offense, which didn't produce any points in two trips inside the 10-yard line in the second half of the 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game, must improve if the Buckeyes are to repeat as national champions.

on defense want to get addressed as well."

Last season, there's no denying that the loss to the Wolverines energized the Buckeyes going into the CFP. The 2024 team came into the first round playing with its hair on fire and looked like a completely different team from the one in 12 regular-season games.

That was evidenced by the offense put-

ting together its best four-game stretch of the season despite playing four games against teams ranked inside the top 10.

In the first 12 games of the season, OSU scored 35.5 points per game and averaged 423.5 yards, which were 16th and 38th in the country, respectively. In the playoffs, it averaged 36.3 points and 447.0 yards, which wasn't much of an increase in either category but was notable given the caliber of competition.

The offense could be in for the same type of explosion in the postseason this year as well.

Throughout this year, Day has made it a point to say that the offense is moving more slowly because they wanted to keep players healthy and fresh during the long season and because the No. 1-ranked defense allowed them to hold back somewhat.

The baseline offensive numbers look very similar to what last year's team did in the regular season. Through 13 games, Ohio State is averaging 34.9 points per game (18th in the country) and 429.5 yards (24th).

If that change was going to happen, it would be natural to expect it to come in the Big Ten Championship Game against Indiana, but the Buckeyes had one of their least explosive games of the year. But the approach change might be something Day is holding onto until the College Football Playoff, if it is in the works at all.

Notably, he called the conference title game the end of the regular season multiple times in his postgame press conference, which could be an insight into what he

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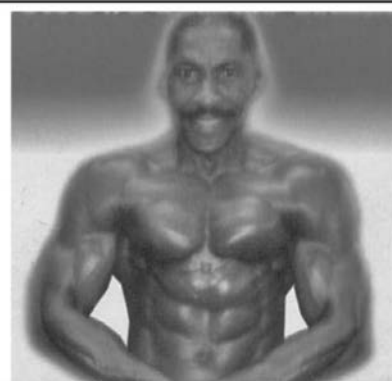
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SONNY BROCKWAY

IN A RUSH — Ohio State freshman running backs Bo Jackson (25) and Isaiah West combined for 87 yards on 20 carries (4.4 yards per carry) when Indiana won the Big Ten title game 13-10. Jackson ran 17 times for 83 yards (4.9) with a long of 20.

thinks of the game and its value.

The Buckeyes have shown that they have the ability to be explosive this year, at least in the pass game. Sayin has been the most accurate passer in the country, and that trait hasn't gone away when he throws the deep ball.

The Buckeyes are tied for fourth in the country with 16 passing plays of 40 or more yards, according to cfbstats.com. Both Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate have shown the ability to get open deep, and Sayin has been able to hit them.

But the run game seems to still be a work in progress, although it has improved

over the course of the year. In the Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State ran for just 58 yards, which was the lowest rushing total of the season, although that was weighed down by Sayin's minus-29 due to getting sacked five times.

Bo Jackson and Isaiah West were the only two running backs to get carries in the game, with Jackson earning 17 carries and taking those for 83 yards and West getting three carries for 4 yards.

Day agreed that the run game could have been better against Indiana.

"I think it was a mixed bag," he said. "There are runs I watched where we

blocked them up and got it to the unblocked hat, and he got us on the ground in 5 or 6 yards. Then there were times when there were a couple of unblocked guys near the line of scrimmage. It was a combination of both of those things."

Despite what Day and the rest of the team believe was an underperformance from Ohio State, they are still going into the playoffs with a solid attitude.

"There's still a bunch of guys in this room that know we can play with anybody in the country and beat anybody in the country when we're on our game," Day said. "It's just a hard reminder that when you're not on your game, you put yourself at risk, and that's exactly what happened."

Left tackle Austin Sierieveld added that the Buckeyes will be ready to go.

"We know we get a second chance," he said postgame. "We don't know where it's going to be at, but we have to come out and swing first and set the tone that we had last year."

While it wouldn't be until the national championship game, Sierieveld welcomes the chance to play Indiana again if the two teams see each other in the bracket.

"We knew that we were the better team, and we just didn't go out and execute and compete at the high level that we're capable of," he said. "Hopefully, we see them again."

What the players have been saying they wanted to do since spring football started this year is be the first Ohio State team to win back-to-back national titles. They still had the same two goals before that as any other Ohio State team does – beating Michi-

gan and winning the Big Ten championship.

Now that the other two are out of the way, there's only one more focus – winning it all.

There are three more games in the way of that goal, with the winner of Texas A&M and Miami (Fla.) being the first obstacle to overcome in the Cotton Bowl.

If the Buckeyes are able to win that game, it would be a stop at the Fiesta Bowl, with No. 3 Georgia, No. 6 Ole Miss and No. 11 Tulane as possible opponents. Then it would be the national championship in Miami at Hard Rock Stadium.

But first, the attention is all on Dallas and what the Buckeyes need to do to win that game.

"We're excited about where we are and going down to Dallas again and playing against a really good opponent," Day said. "You look at the playoffs, and there are some really good teams out there. Whether you're the one, two, three or four (seed), you've got to play from here on out. That's just how it goes."

Sayin said that being with the team last year and working behind Will Howard in the quarterback room helped him learn how to handle the spot the Buckeyes are currently in.

"I think he had a great season, then even elevated in the postseason and played really well down the stretch," Sayin said. "It was awesome to learn from him."

"As a quarterback, you have to rise to the occasion," Sayin added. "We say here, 'The best players play their best in the biggest games,' so you have to rise to the occasion and be ready for the moment."

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF INSIDER

Bucks No. 2 In CFP Poll

Ohio State claimed the No. 2 overall ranking and ultimately a first-round bye in the final College Football Playoff rankings.

The Buckeyes fell to the second seed after losing to then-No. 2 Indiana 13-10 in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 6. The 13-0 Hoosiers claimed the No. 1 overall seed after the victory made them the final undefeated team in the FBS.

No. 3 Georgia, the SEC champion, and No. 4 Texas Tech, the Big 12 champion, earned the final two first-round byes after winning their respective conferences.

The rest of the 12-team College Football Playoff consists of No. 5 Oregon, No.

6 Ole Miss, No. 7 Texas A&M, No. 8 Oklahoma, No. 9 Alabama, No. 10 Miami (Fla.), No. 20 Tulane and No. 24 James Madison. Tulane and James Madison earned the No. 11 and No. 12 seeds in the playoffs as the fourth and fifth highest-ranked conference champions.

Duke defeated then-No. 17 Virginia 27-20 in overtime in the ACC championship to push James Madison into the playoffs.

Although Notre Dame sat ahead of Miami in the penultimate College Football Playoff rankings, the Irish fell to No. 11 and out of the field after the committee determined the Hurricanes deserved the spot in part due to their 27-24 Week 1 win in the teams' head-to-head matchup.

BYU fell one spot to No. 12 after a 34-7 loss in the Big 12 championship, while No. 19 Virginia was the only team that fell more than one spot.

Ohio State will find out its first-round playoff opponent at the culmination of the game between Texas A&M and Miami, which will face off at noon on Dec. 20. The Buckeyes are set to take on the winner in the Cotton Bowl at 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 31.

If the Buckeyes win in the Cotton Bowl, they will move on to the Fiesta Bowl, which will be played on Jan. 8 at 7:30 p.m.

OSU In Dallas To Avoid Miami Home Game

With Ohio State getting a first-round bye, the College Football Playoff committee set the Buckeyes' destination to the Cotton Bowl in an effort to avoid giving the Hurricanes a home game.



SONNY BROCKWAY

DOUBLE DUTY — Although offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was named head coach of South Florida on Dec. 3, he remains Ohio State's play-caller through the playoffs. The timing of his hiring did not sit well with some fans after the Buckeyes, three days later, had trouble scoring in a 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game.

After Big Ten champion Indiana earned the No. 1 seed and was placed in the Rose Bowl and SEC champion Georgia was given the No. 3 seed and assigned to the Sugar Bowl, the selection committee was forced to decide whether Ohio State would play in either the Cotton Bowl in Dallas or the Orange Bowl in Miami.

CFP selection committee chairman Hunter Yurachek said on Dec. 7 that the committee weighed geography and whether it was a neutral site when finalizing Ohio State's bowl placement.

"Looking at the potential second-round matchups for Ohio State and either Texas A&M or Miami – the fact is that Miami, if they had won that game, would have had a huge advantage playing on their home field in the Orange Bowl," Yurachek said. "If Texas A&M wins that game, playing in the Cotton Bowl while in Texas is a true neutral-site field. For that reason, that's how we assigned Ohio State to the Cotton Bowl."

Yurachek also identified Ohio State's

résumé and tight Big Ten championship loss to Indiana as key factors that kept the Buckeyes ahead of Georgia in the final seeding.

"You had a one vs. two matchup in the Big Ten, Indiana and Ohio State, a hotly contested game. Indiana won by three, but Ohio State missed a late field goal that could have potentially tied that game and sent it into overtime. They had another failed fourth-down conversion there in the second half. I thought that game was really, really close," Yurachek said. "Then, when you look at Georgia comparatively to Ohio State, their schedule strengths are relatively similar, as are their record strengths, but statistically, especially on the offensive and defensive side of the ball, Ohio State looks a little bit better on the statistical side. So that's why the committee chose to give the nod to Ohio State over Georgia."

Ohio State will now appear in the Cotton Bowl for the third straight season. The Buckeyes fell to Missouri 14-3 in the 2023 Cotton Bowl before bouncing back last sea-

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SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE MIX — Fourth-year defensive end C.J. Hicks may be on the field in the playoffs despite announcing on Oct. 5 that he would use the 2025 season as a redshirt year. NCAA rules allow up to four games to preserve eligibility, but the postseason is exempt. He played in Ohio State's first four games of the season.

son to defeat Texas 28-14 to advance to last season's national championship game.

Hartline Coaching Through Playoffs

Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline accepted a position as South Florida's next head coach on Dec. 3, but he will remain with the Buckeyes throughout the College Football Playoff.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said Hartline was the play-caller for the Big Ten Championship Game and will continue to call plays throughout the playoffs.

However, Hartline's focus on Ohio State was questioned following the Buckeyes' 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten championship. The Hoosiers held Ohio State to its lowest scoring total of the season, its third-lowest yardage total of the year (322) and its worst rushing output (58 yards) of the 2025 season.

Hartline admitted that the week of the championship game was a struggle, acknowledging the challenges of balancing multiple jobs.

"Frankly, I would say last week was the hardest week, just with the amount of things that were moving and being pulled away and all these things," said Hartline in his introductory press conference at South Florida. "Once we get through this week, we have a little bit of time to get back to take a breath, get organized and then be able to operate a little bit from afar and also be cleaner there. So I'm going to feel a lot better moving forward than I was last week. Last week was a tough week."

Despite his offense struggling in the conference title game and Hartline essen-

tially managing two high-profile jobs over the next month, Day said he isn't worried about Hartline's ability to focus on Ohio State when he's in Columbus and South Florida when he's in Tampa.

"I think that when he's here, he is going to be locked in," Day said. "He's made it clear that he wants to finish this the right way and be locked in here. He knows that it's important for him. Certainly, being a Buckeye and all the time he spent here and what he's poured into this place matters to him. So when he goes down there, he's got work to do down there, but when he gets here, he'll be locked in and doing his job here."

Day continued, stating that though Hartline may be gone for large gaps, the head coach himself will be freer to help with the offensive scheme and game plan during the playoffs.

"Based on how the month goes, we'll see how that plays into the game week and those types of things," Day said. "The good news, at least for me, is that I can spend a lot more time on the game plan now, having a little bit more lead time going into the game. So I will try to help as best I can."

Sayin Ready For Both A&M, Miami

As Ohio State sits in a rare spot without a confirmed opponent, having a first-round bye in the College Football Playoff, quarterback Julian Sayin is getting ready for any scenario.

In Sayin's press conference on Dec. 10, the redshirt freshman said that he is preparing for both of Ohio State's potential quarterfinal matchups, whether it's Texas

A&M or Miami (Fla.).

"I'm definitely going to watch both," Sayin said. "I'm excited to watch that game on Dec. 20. I'm excited to watch that one, and I will be prepared for both, because they're both great teams, and either one of them can win that game."

Because they will not know their opponent until Dec. 20, the Buckeyes will have only 11 days to specifically prepare for one opponent.

Still, Sayin said Ohio State is only looking ahead after its defeat to the Hoosiers, citing how he feels the Buckeyes can make a deep run similar to how their late loss to Michigan last season ignited them through the playoffs in 2024.

"You saw what happened last year and saw how we were fueled into the playoffs, and we know we can go do it again," Sayin said. "We know what happened (against Indiana). We know what went wrong. We've just got to go fix the mistakes and fix the execution."

OSU May Implement Hicks In Playoffs

The undefeated Buckeyes could be gaining some ammunition heading into the playoffs.

Fourth-year defensive end C.J. Hicks, who announced he would redshirt this season after Ohio State's 42-3 win over Minnesota on Oct. 4, is able to play for the Buckeyes in the postseason. NCAA rules allow players to play in up to four games while preserving their eligibility with a redshirt, but postseason games are exempt

from that four-game limitation, meaning Hicks can go back in the rotation for the Buckeyes now that postseason play is under way.

Day said on Dec. 2 that Hicks may earn playing time for Ohio State in the postseason and that he helped Ohio State's offensive line prepare ahead of its 27-9 win over Michigan on Nov. 29.

"He has to get back to practicing with the defense and on special teams and kind of get going this week and get back in the mix," Day said. "He's been on the scout team and has good energy and a good work ethic."

"I thought he did a really good job (before the Michigan game), and some of the success some of our offensive line had against their edge rushers was because of some of the work that C.J. did against our tackles. He gave great effort and had a good attitude this whole run. We'll get him back out on the field and figure out where he might fit in."

Hicks is certainly not short on talent. Out of high school, he was ranked a top-10 recruit nationally, but he has struggled to make an impact so far at Ohio State. Hicks came into Columbus as a linebacker but earned limited playing time in his first three years with the team.

He switched to defensive end this year and tallied six total tackles, made a TFL and registered a quarterback hurry before redshirting. Although he was eligible to play in the Big Ten Championship Game, Hicks didn't earn playing time in Ohio State's loss to Indiana.

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Fielding Misses Game-Tying FG Against IU

Down 13-10 with 10:45 to play in the Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State received possession at its own 10-yard line.

GAME NOTEBOOK Sam Cipriani

With a chance to tie or take the lead, the Buckeyes used 15 plays and nearly eight minutes to drive 81 yards down the field to the Indiana 9-yard line. Then, on third down with just 1 yard to gain, quarterback Julian Sayin tossed an incompleteness off the hands of tight end Bennett Christian to force fourth down.

Instead of attempting to get the single yard to gain, Ohio State elected to kick what would be a 27-yard field goal to equalize the game at 13.

However, on Jayden Fielding's attempt, the senior kicker hooked a wobbly ball to the left. The missed kick allowed Indiana to tick off valuable seconds of the clock on its final offensive possession, ultimately sealing the Hoosiers' first-ever win in the Big Ten Championship Game, 13-10.

Junior offensive lineman Luke Montgomery said that though most will see Fielding's kick as the game's defining moment, he believes if Ohio State cleared up its mistakes throughout the game, the Buckeyes wouldn't have been in that position in the first place.

"We're a team, so we've got to pick him up," Montgomery said. "It wasn't all on him. I think we could have played a lot better as an offensive line today. It is just what it is, but it wasn't just on him. I know that he was out there on an island, but we're all there for him, and we could have done a lot of things better for him so we wouldn't be in that moment."

Senior defensive end Caden Curry expressed a similar sentiment, saying the defense could have done more as well.

"It's a team sport," Curry said. "It's not individualistic. That's why we all play it. We're not just going to dog him for that. There are more plays the defense could have made. There are more plays the offense could have made. There are more plays that special teams could make. I mean, it's not just one person that defines the game. So nothing's wrong with Jayden. I'm not going to put it all on him."

Mendoza, Sayin Trade First-Quarter Picks

In a quarterback matchup between two Heisman favorites, Ohio State's Julian Sayin and Indiana's Fernando Mendoza weren't their usual hyper-efficient selves early in the Big Ten Championship Game. Coming into the title game, Sayin led the nation with a 78.9 completion percentage, while Mendoza ranked fifth with a 72.0 percent mark.

After Ohio State forced a punt on Indiana's opening drive, the Buckeyes received the ball on their own 12-yard line. Sayin tossed a 13-yard completion to wideout



SONNY BROCKWAY

FAILED — Teammates were quick to defend Jayden Fielding (38) after he missed a 27-yard field goal with 2:48 left in the fourth quarter, which would have tied Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 6. The Hoosiers were able to consume all but the final 18 seconds, giving the Buckeyes little chance for a miracle finish in their 13-10 loss.

Jeremiah Smith on Ohio State's first offensive play for a first down, but the Buckeyes stalled.

Sayin threw an incompleteness on the following play, before a 4-yard rush from running back Bo Jackson. Then, on third-and-6 Sayin dropped back to pass and rifled the football into the middle of the field intended for wideout Brandon Inniss. The pass was tipped by Indiana cornerback Louis Moore as it neared Inniss, and the defensive back intercepted the ball and took the pick 12 yards to the Ohio State 23-yard line. The turnover resulted in a 29-yard field goal by Indiana kicker Nico Radicic to give the Hoosiers an early 3-0 lead.

After his second straight game with a turnover on Ohio State's opening offensive possession, Sayin emphasized the importance of eliminating mistakes early.

"First off, you can't turn the ball over early in the game like that," Sayin said. "It puts us in a bad spot. It gives them points for that. So those points are on me. But I'm just battling adversity, not letting it overtake your mind and moving on to the next one."

Following an Ohio State punt on the ensuing Buckeye drive, Indiana gained possession on its own 11-yard line. It would take just four plays for Mendoza to see a similar fate as Sayin.

Mendoza threw an incompleteness on the first play of the drive before Indiana running back Roman Hemby took a carry for 8 yards and the quarterback scrambled for 9 yards and a first down. But on first-and-10 from the Hoosiers' 28, Mendoza attempted a pass for wide receiver Elijah Sarratt.

However, Ohio State nickel back Lorenzo Styles Jr. got to the receiver first, and instead of hitting its intended receiver, the ball bounced off Indiana tight end Riley Nowakowski and into the hands of Buckeye cornerback Davison Igbinosun, who returned the interception 2 yards to the 25. Four plays later Ohio State was in the end zone to grab a 7-3 advantage on a Carnell Tate reception with 46 seconds to go in the first quarter.

OSU Struggles On Third Down

Headed into the Big Ten Championship

Game, Ohio State's offense had the most efficient unit in the country when it came to converting third downs. The Buckeyes led the nation at a 56.9 percent third-down conversion rate, but in the conference title game, they converted on just four of their 12 total attempts.

Ohio State failed to convert on third down in each of its first five attempts, and several of the Buckeyes' early drives fell short due to inability to find success in late-down situations.

Sayin was intercepted on Ohio State's first third-down attempt six minutes into the game, and on the Buckeyes' second chance roughly five minutes later, the quarterback was sacked for a 4-yard loss which resulted in a punt. The trend continued into the second quarter as both Buckeye drives in the period were ended by Ohio State's failed third-down attempts.

Sayin was again sacked for a 4-yard loss on third-and-6 which led to a 30-yard field goal made by Fielding, and on Ohio State's last offensive possession of the half, the Buckeyes were unable to convert on a third-and-8 to extend their drive. Ohio State's third-down efforts were futile early in the third quarter as well, when the Buckeyes couldn't convert a third-and-29 on their opening possession of the half.

After failing on its first five tries, Ohio State picked up three out of its next four attempts. But when it mattered most, the Buckeyes were unable to capitalize. Sayin tossed an incomplete pass on third-and-1 from the 9-yard line, before Fielding missed the potential game-tying kick with 2:48 to play.

Head coach Ryan Day highlighted Ohio State's struggles on third down, adding that the inability to establish the run early hindered their ability to convert late downs.

"On third downs, 4 of 12 is not good enough," Day said. "We didn't really establish the run. They were playing a decent amount of coverage. When they're playing that much coverage, you should be able to run the football consistently. When you're not converting on third down, you're not scoring in the red zone. That's the story of the game. It's a tough lesson to learn, but it's going to get fixed fast."

Ohio State did convert on its final third-down attempt — a 46-yard bomb to Smith — however the wideout was tackled as time expired, ending the game.

OSU Pass Protection Falters Vs IU

In Ohio State and Indiana's showdown in the Big Ten Championship Game, the Hoosier defensive front got the best of the Buckeyes' offensive line. Indiana was routinely able to create pressure on Ohio State, racking up a whopping five sacks on Sayin while hurrying the quarterback twice.

Prior to Ohio State's trip to Indianapolis, the Buckeyes had given up just six sacks all season. Only Purdue had recorded more than one sack against Ohio State in a single game in 2025 before the game against the Hoosiers.

Day noted Ohio State's struggles in pass protection served as an important lesson

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Ohio State gave up just 13 points in the loss to No. 2 Indiana at Lucas Oil Stadium, with the defense showing up at major points. After quarterback Julian Sayin threw an interception in the first quarter, the defense was put in poor field position, with the Hoosiers needing just 23 yards to get into the end zone. But defensive coordinator Matt Patricia's unit stood tall with its back against the wall and was able to hold them to a field goal.

The red-zone defense shone throughout most of the game until Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza was able to find receiver Elijah Sarratt in the end zone for a 17-yard score midway through the third quarter to take a 13-10 lead that would hold throughout the remainder of the game.

Indiana made it just inside the red zone at the start of the second quarter, but a 2-yard sack by junior defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. led to another field-goal attempt, which Nico Radicic missed. Then on Indiana's next drive, Ohio State was able to make another stop in the red zone for a Radicic field goal for the 10-6 halftime score.

What Didn't Work

Going into the game, if anyone knew that Ohio State was going to give up just 13 points, they would have likely thought that would be enough to win the game. It has been in any other contest the Buckeyes have been a part of this season. But the offense wasn't able to finish extended drives, and many times it wasn't able to go on extended drives at all, with Indiana making stops early and often.

That was largely due to the offensive line, which played perhaps its worst game of the season. Over 12 games of the regular season, Sayin was sacked six times. Against the Hoosiers in the Big Ten Championship Game, the redshirt freshman was brought down five times. Ohio State also gave up nine tackles for loss in the game, losing 38 yards on those TFLs.

Many times it was the right side of the offensive line that faltered, which has been a common theme this season when there are issues with the front five. Late in the game, the Buckeyes even decided to replace right guard Tegra Tshabola with redshirt-freshman Gabe VanSickle rotating in the game.

It has been a problem spot for the Buckeyes throughout the season, and whoever was making the decision to substitute for Tshabola when the Buckeyes were down 13-10 late in the fourth quarter obviously thought that rolled over into this game.

Play Of The Game

Ohio State had multiple drives down the field in which it was able to get into the red zone but was unable to convert on short-down situations. In the third quarter, the Buckeyes had a fourth-and-1 and sent Sayin on a quarterback sneak up the middle, which he didn't convert due to his leg touching the turf before he was able to get the ball past the marker.

The very next time Day was faced with that scenario, he elected to instead kick a field goal. Jayden Fielding, who was 15 of 17 this season coming into the game and 6 of 6 on field goals between 20 and 29 yards, had a 27-yard kick from the right hash to tie the game up. But Fielding shanked the kick wide left, never giving the ball a chance to get inside the uprights.

Fielding has missed important kicks before – going 1 for 3 in the game against Michigan last season, another contest that the Buckeyes dropped 13-10 – so Ohio State is no stranger to missed chip shots in the past couple of years. This one ended up being what decided the game, with Ohio State getting the ball back with just 18 seconds left in the game, giving it no chance to move down the field for another score.

— Greg Wilson

for the Buckeyes.

"They obviously brought different pressures and twists, but that was something that they had done all season," Day said. "They were good at it, and we didn't handle it very well at all. So there were times we did, but we weren't consistent enough.

"This is a major lesson for this team. It can come down to one play or two plays or three plays that decide a game like this. This is a tough lesson to learn, but we have to be more efficient across the board. It can't just be us doing our job once or twice or three times. It's got to be every single time. That didn't happen. That starts with the coaching and then goes from there."

Junior offensive lineman Austin Siereveld said despite feeling like the better team and being ready for a variety of exotic pres-

sures, he believed Indiana got the better of Ohio State's offensive line.

"We saw it on film. We were prepared for it, and they got the best of us tonight," Siereveld said.

Bucks Struggle On The Ground

After one of its most successful rushing performances of the season in Ohio State's rivalry bout with Michigan on Nov. 27, the Buckeyes turned in their worst performance of the year against Indiana.

The Hoosiers' front seven held Ohio State to just 58 yards on the ground on 26 carries, for an average of 2.2 yards per rush. Freshman running back Jackson led the way for Ohio State with 17 carries for

83 yards, while fellow rookie Isaiah West toted the ball just three times for 4 yards.

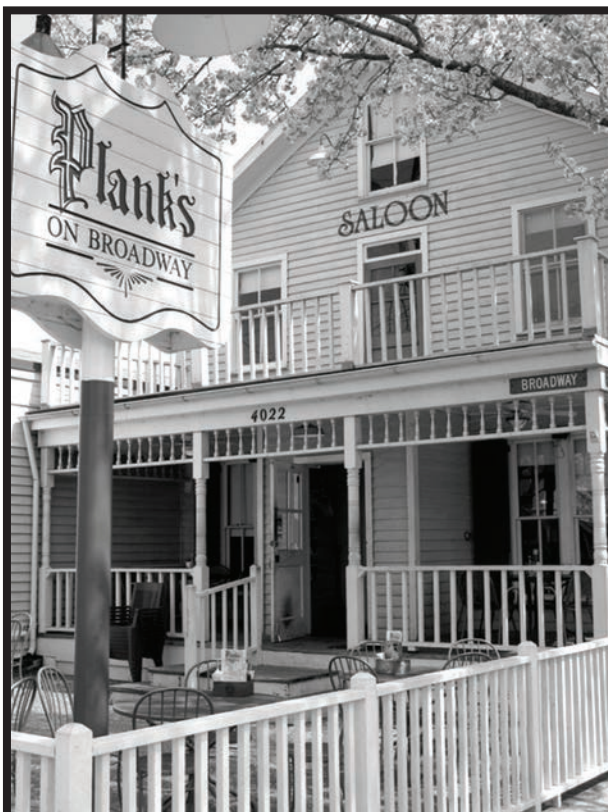
Ohio State had just two rushes for 10 or more yards on Dec. 6, both by Jackson – a 20-yard rush just two plays into the second half and a 10-yard sprint on the Buckeyes' second-to-last drive that resulted in Fielding's missed game-tying kick.

Day noted that the Buckeyes simply weren't efficient enough on early downs to stay on schedule, which put more pressure on the passing game and limited their ability to finish drives. He reiterated that Ohio State's identity is built on balance, and when that balance disappears, so does its margin for error, especially in big games.

"We didn't really establish the run," Day said. "They were playing a decent amount of coverage. So when they're playing that

much coverage, you should be able to run the football consistently. When you're not converting on third down, and you're not scoring in the red zone, that's the story of the game. So it's a tough lesson to learn, but it's going to get fixed fast."

Ohio State's low rushing total is somewhat skewed by the Buckeyes' five sacks allowed on Sayin, with the quarterback totaling minus-29 yards rushing at Lucas Oil Stadium. Without the five quarterback take-downs, it still would have been Ohio State's second-worst rushing performance of the year (77 yards against Texas in the season opener) and the third time the Buckeyes have failed to hit the century mark on the ground (Wisconsin, 98 yards).



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Buckeyes Fail To Deliver B1G Play In Loss

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The game was there for the taking, but two red-zone failures were enough to derail Ohio State's dreams of an undefeated season and an elusive conference title when No. 2 Indiana upended the top-ranked Buckeyes 13-10 in the Big Ten Championship Game at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Dec. 6.

A 17-yard TD catch by Elijah Sarratt at 8:02 of the third quarter put the Hoosiers (13-0) ahead 13-10.

The Buckeyes (12-1) then were stopped at the IU 5 on fourth down, and later, they drove from their 10 to a fourth-and-1 at the 9, but Jayden Fielding missed a 27-yard field goal with 2:48 to play.

Ohio State led 10-6 at the half on a Carnell Tate 9-yard catch and a 30-yard field goal by Fielding to counter two FGs by Nico Radacic (29, 32 yards).

Julian Sayin completed 21 of 29 passes for 258 yards with a TD and an interception. Jeremiah Smith made eight catches for 144 yards.

IU's Fernando Mendoza was 15 of 23 for 222 yards, a touchdown and an interception, with Charlie Becker making six catches for 126 yards.

The Hoosiers won their first Big Ten title since 1967. OSU was seeking its first since 2020.

Defense Rules

Ohio State won the toss and deferred to the second half, allowing the Hoosiers' offense a crack at the nation's top defense.

On the first play, Mendoza completed a 9-yard pass to Sarratt. Mendoza had to leave for a play after being belted in the shoulder by defensive end Caden Curry as he was throwing.

Mendoza's younger brother, Alberto, replaced him, and he handed off to Roman Hemby for a 1-yard gain and a first down. Fernando returned, and on third-and-4 from the IU 41, he scrambled and tossed a 10-yard pass to Becker to the OSU 49.

On third-and-7 from the 46, Curry had a 5-yard sack, and the Buckeyes took over at the 12 after a 39-yard punt.

Smith opened the drive with a 13-yard catch. After an incompleteness and a 4-yard run by Bo Jackson, Sayin was intercepted by Louis Moore at the OSU 35, and he returned it to the 23.

Sayin also had been picked off on the Buckeyes' second play in the previous game against Michigan that resulted in a field goal.

The defense bailed him out again. After a 1-yard run by Kaelon Black, Sarratt had an 11-yard catch. On third-and-10 from the 11, Curry deflected a pass, and Radacic made a 29-yard field goal for a 3-0 lead at 6:51.

The Buckeyes, after the kickoff, started from the 25, and Smith made a 7-yard catch, Tate had one for 5, and Smith's third reception went for 12. Jackson ran for 7 then lost 2 to set up a third-and-5 from the 46. Rolijah Hardy sacked Sayin for 4 yards, forcing a 39-yard punt to the 11 by Joe McGuire.

Mendoza's keeper for 9 on third-and-2 moved the ball to the 28, but on the next play, Lorenzo Styles Jr. tipped a screen pass, and Davison Igbinosun intercepted it at the IU 27 and returned it 2 yards. It was the second straight game with an INT for Igbinosun.

Jackson ran for 8 yards, and a face-mask penalty on IU's Mario Landino placed the ball on the 8. The Hoosiers were then flagged for offsides to the 4.

Sayin threw incomplete to Smith, and a false start on Jackson moved the ball back to the 9. Sayin then escaped the pocket to his right and found an open Tate at the back of the end zone for a 7-3 lead with 46 seconds left. The drive was three plays in 55 seconds.

Mendoza, on the next possession, went deep on the first snap, resulting in a pass interference on Styles to the IU 40. Black then rushed for 37 yards to the 23 before he gained 1 yard to end the quarter.

IU led in yards, 91-59, with 61 coming on the ground.

Hemby continued the drive with a run for 3, and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. had a 2-yard sack, setting up a 39-yard field-goal try that Radacic, who had made 16 in a row, missed just outside the left upright at 13:31.

OSU took over at the 22. On the second play, Smith hauled in a 52-yarder to the 22, and a personal foul on IU added another 11 yards. Jackson gained just 4 yards on two carries, and Sayin was sacked for a second time for 4 yards. Fielding then made a 30-yard FG for a 10-3 score at 10:08.

The Hoosiers responded with their own field goal to make it 10-6 with 2:47 left before the half.

From the 25, Mendoza completed a 14-yarder to Jonathan Brady before a holding penalty made it first-and-20, but the Hoosiers made up for it. Hemby followed a 7-yard run with a 7-yard catch, and Mendoza went to Becker for 10 yards to the OSU 47 for the first down.

Later, facing a fourth-and-2 from the OSU 9, Indiana took a timeout before Mendoza connected with Riley Nowakowski for 9, and Black ran for 9. Black gained a first down with a yard to the 20. Mendoza had a 2-yard loss on a keeper, and Curry added a 3-yard sack. Nowakowski got back 11 with a catch, but the Hoosiers were still 4 yards shy of a first, and Radacic made a 32-yard field goal.

The Buckeyes began at the 25, and Tate had an 11-yard catch, but the Buckeyes elected not to use a timeout as the clock wound down to 2:00. Jackson ran for 4 before Sayin was sacked for a third time for 2 yards and, on third down, threw incomplete to Smith. McGuire's punt of 47 yards was caught at the 15 with 25 seconds left, and Hemby ran for 3 on the final play.



Julian Sayin

The Hoosiers in the first half totaled 166 yards (87 pass, 79 rush) compared to 128 for OSU (109 pass, 19 rush). Sayin was 7 of 11 for 109 yards with Smith making four catches for 84 and Tate three for 25. Mendoza completed 9 of 15 for 87 yards, and Black ran for 54 yards on seven carries.

Indiana's leading receiver, Omar Cooper Jr., left the game early in the first half with a leg injury without making a catch.

Red Alert

Sayin opened the second half with a 9-yard pass to tight end Will Kacmarek, and Jackson rambled for 20 prior to a 5-yard sack. Then Sayin was controversially called for being in the grasp for a loss of 14 for a third-and-29 from the OSU 37, even though he spun out of the tackle and threw the ball away.

That was the fifth sack, one fewer than the Buckeyes had allowed in the first 12 games combined.

A 1-yard pass to Smith followed, and McGuire boomed a 50-yard punt to the 12.

It took seven plays and 3:30 for the Hoosiers to go the distance, capped by a third-down, 17-yard TD catch by Sarratt to make it 13-10 at the 8:02 mark.

It was the first time OSU trailed in the second half this season.

On third-and-2 from their own 20, Mendoza threw a dart for 51 yards to Becker to the OSU 29. Hemby immediately ran 10 to the 19, and then Black ran for 2. After an incompleteness, Mendoza found Sarratt near the left pylon.

Looking to rally, two Jackson runs totaled 6 yards, and a pass of 5 yards to Brandon Inniss gave the Buckeyes a fresh set of downs at the 36, before tight end Max Klare got 20 yards on a catch to the IU 44.

The Buckeyes continued to have trouble running, and Isaiah West lost 1 before Smith's reception of 18 placed the ball at the 27. Sayin went back to Klare for 8, and Jackson almost broke a long run but settled for 5 yards to the 14. On first down, Kacmarek had a 7-yard catch, and Jackson gained 2 for a third-and-1 from the 5.

Sayin threw incomplete to Smith at the 1. On fourth down, Sayin appeared to gain 2 on a sneak behind the big bodies, but a review overturned the call because his knee was down before crossing the 4-yard line, and Indiana got the ball at the 5 with 1:04 left in the quarter.

After Black was stuffed for no gain, E.J. Williams had a 12-yard catch to the 17 to end the third quarter. Two plays later, the Hoosiers got a 15-yard catch from Becker, but the Hoosiers punted from their 49, and OSU got the ball at the 10 after a 3-yard return by Inniss with 10:45 remaining.

Jackson ran for 4 and 10 to get the Buckeyes some operating room at the 24. A third-and-5 from the 29 resulted in an

8-yard catch by C.J. Donaldson, but the Hoosiers got a 5-yard loss on a pass to Smith. Jackson was able to gain 7 on a reception. On third-and-8 from the 39, Sayin hit Tate for 20 on the right sideline to the IU 41. Jackson rushed for 2, and Sayin had an incompleteness.

It was third-and-8 from the 39 when, on a trick play, Inniss passed to Jackson for 6, but IU was called for a low block. The extra 15 yards put the ball at the 18, and the Buckeyes were poised to either tie or take the lead with 4:33 to play, especially when Jackson peeled off 8 yards on the next play for a second-and-2 from the 10. Jackson got a hard-fought 1, but on third down, a pass to Bennett Christian was broken up.

After failing to convert in the red zone on the previous drive and having struggled in goal-line situations against Michigan, coach Ryan Day opted for the field goal. Fielding from the right hash pulled it left. The Indiana fans among the 68,214 in attendance exploded as Buckeye followers stared in disbelief.

The Buckeyes were 2 of 4 in the red zone, 4 of 12 on third-down conversions, and 0 for 1 on fourth down.

"We went down there two times and end up with zero points, and that's how you lose a game," Day said. "Third downs were not very good, not very good in the red zone, obviously, at the end. So, very disappointed."

There was still hope for OSU with a defensive stand when Indiana took possession at its own 20. Black ran for 5, prompting an Ohio State timeout at 2:44. Black gained 1, and OSU took another timeout at the 2:41 mark. Then Mendoza had a Heisman Trophy moment with a 33-yard pass to Becker to the OSU 43 as the clock went to the two-minute timeout.

It was reminiscent of the 56-yard bomb Will Howard had thrown to Smith to help seal the national championship against Notre Dame 11 months earlier.

After Black gained 5 yards on three carries, IU used a timeout then punted 24 yards to the 14, where Inniss made a fair catch with 18 seconds left and OSU with no timeouts.

Donaldson had a 1-yard catch that used five seconds. After a long incompleteness, there were two seconds remaining for the final snap, Smith's 46-yard catch to the IU 39 that padded the stats.

Notes

Indiana totaled 340 yards (222 pass, 118 rush). Ohio State had 322 (264 pass, 58 rush). The Buckeyes averaged 2.2 yards per carry. ... Jackson had 83 yards on 17 carries (4.9) while Tate's four catches went for 45 yards. Black gained 69 yards on 16 rushes (4.3). ... Sonny Styles had a game-high 12 tackles (seven solo). ... Curry had two sacks for 8 yards; Kenyatta Jackson had the other for 2 yards. ... The Hoosiers had five sacks for 29 yards and nine tackles for loss for 38 yards.



Bo Jackson

BSB Quotebook: Indiana 13, Ohio State 10

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on his feelings after the loss: "I'm very disappointed overall with how we played. Third downs were not very good, and we were not very good in the red zone, obviously at the end, so I'm very disappointed. I thought Indiana played really well. They did a great job. Obviously, we're disappointed we didn't finish out this regular season the way we wanted to."

Redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin on his first interception and how he bounced back from it: "First off, I can't turn the ball over early in the game like that. It put our defense in a bad spot, giving Indiana points. Those points are on me. I was just battling adversity and not letting it overtake your mind and just being able to move on to the next one."

Day on the performance of senior defensive end Caden Curry: "I thought the guys played really, really hard, and certainly Caden led the way with three TFLs, but he's been like that all year and that's who he is and the player he's become. I thought the defense was gritty tonight, played hard and gave us a chance to win, and he was a big part of that."

Day on his decision to call a quarterback sneak on fourth down in the third quarter: "For the most part our sneaks have been pretty good for us. We felt like we've been pretty good at it, but we didn't execute it in this one. We'll have to figure out if that's the right thing to do moving forward and try to put our guys in the best position to be successful."

Sophomore offensive lineman Austin Siereveld on Ohio State's issues in the red zone: "You have to score when you're in the red zone. You can't leave it up to field goals and by chance. When we're down there we have to score. That's what we have to do."

Junior offensive lineman Luke Montgomery on what Indiana did to give them issues: "I think they run a really



SONNY BROCKWAY

WRAPPED UP — Defensive end Caden Curry (92) recorded two sacks of Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza (15) in the Big Ten Championship Game in Indianapolis on Dec. 6. Despite Curry's efforts, the Buckeyes lost 13-10.

good scheme, they're taught very well and they know what to do. Hats off to them. Congrats to them. We'll see them again."

Siereveld on the message in the locker room after the loss: "We know we have a second chance. We don't know where it's going to be, but we have to come out swinging, and we have to swing first. We just have to set the tone that we had last year and just keep it rolling."

Sayin on the key to bouncing back in the playoffs after the loss: "I think last year, me being a freshman, I just saw that group stick together. There was good leadership in that group and they were together. That's a big part for us, is just sticking together and having each other's backs."

Montgomery on if it is better for Ohio State to have some issues exposed in the Big Ten Championship Game as opposed to during the playoffs: "Yeah, I would say so. I think that comes with practice and stuff like that. I think we can find that in practice."

We just have to stay more locked in and stuff like that. Issues arose today, and it is what it is and now we just have to correct them."

Junior defensive tackle Kayden McDonald on what was said in the locker room after the game: "It can come down to one play. We just kept fighting until the end, and we didn't come out on top, but we live another day so that's all that matters."

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti on what the Hoosiers did to win the game: "On defense, we created a lot of issues. Ohio State did scratch out a run game in that second half and missed that field goal. Of course we missed one too, so it's even."

Cignetti on his defense's ability to create tackles for loss: "We've always been high on TFLs and sacks. We got a great effort from our front guys. We were dialing up those blitzes. We got that quarterback off rhythm. We let him out of the pocket a few times, which we can't do, but all in all, I thought we played pretty well."

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The Numbers Game

Indiana 13, Ohio State 10

Dec. 6, 2025 – Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, Ind.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
INDIANA	3	3	7	0	13
OHIO STATE	7	3	0	0	10

First Quarter

IU – Radicic, 29-yard field goal, 6:51.

OSU – Tate, 9-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 0:46.

Second Quarter

OSU – Fielding, 30-yard field goal, 10:18.

IU – Radicic, 32-yard field goal, 2:47.

Third Quarter

IU – Sarratt, 17-yard pass from Mendoza (Radicic kick), 8:02.

Att. – 68,214

Weather – Indoor

Team Statistics		
	IU	OSU
First Downs	17	17
Rushing	5	3
Passing	11	11
Penalty	1	3
Rushes-Yards	34-118	26-58
Passing Yards	222	264
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	15-23-1	22-30-1
Offensive Plays	57	56
Total Net Yards	340	322
Third Down Efficiency	6-13	4-12
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1	0-1
Punts-Avg.	3-35.7	3-45.3
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties	5-49	2-20
Time of Possession	29:47	30:13

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **IU:** Black 16-69; Hemby 13-52; F. Mendoza 5-(-3). **OSU:** Jackson 17-83;

West 3-4; Sayin 6-(-29).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **IU:** F. Mendoza 15-23-1-222-1. **OSU:** Sayin 21-29-1-258-1;

Inniss 1-1-0-6-0

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **IU:** Becker 6-126; Sarratt 3-37; Brady 2-20; Nowakowski 2-20; Williams Jr.

1-12; Hemby 1-7. **OSU:** Smith 8-144; Tate 4-45; Klare 2-28; Kacmarek 3-20; Jackson 2-13; Donaldson Jr. 2-9;

Inniss 1-5.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **IU:** McCarthy 3-35.7-44. **OSU:** McGuire 3-45.3-50.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** None. **OSU:** Inniss 1-3.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** None. **OSU:** Inniss 1-23.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** None. **OSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** Moore 1-12. **OSU:** Igbinosun 1-2.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** Jones 2-6; Daley 1-14; Landino 1-5; Hardy 1-4. **OSU:** Curry 2-8; Jackson Jr. 1-2.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** Jones 2-6; Hardy 1.5-5; Tucker 1.5-2; Daley 1-14; Boykin 1-5;

Landino 1-5; Kamara 0.5-1; Moore 0.5-0. **OSU:** Curry 3-9; Jackson Jr. 1-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **IU:** Hardy 6-4-10; Ponds 6-3-9; Jones 3-4-7; Moore 3-3-6; Ferrell 3-2-5; Fisher 2-3-5; Daley 2-1-3; Tucker 1-2-3; Baldwin Jr. 0-2-2; Boykin 2-0-2; Sharpe 1-1-2; Kamara 0-1-1; Utzinger 0-1-1; Nowakowski 1-0-1; Becker 0-1-1; Ratcliff 1-0-1; Landino 1-0-1. **OSU:** Styles 7-5-12; Downs 6-2-8; Curry 4-3-7; McClain 5-1-6; McDonald 2-1-5; Igbinosun 3-1-4; Jackson Jr. 1-2-3; Mathews Jr. 2-0-2; Houston 1-1-2; Sanchez 1-0-1; Reese 0-1-1; Tate 1-0-1; Malone 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **IU:** Evans, Smith, Lynch, Michalski, Coogan, F. Mendoza, Hemby, Nowakowski, Cooper Jr, Sarratt, Becker, Ferrell, Ponds, Moore, Sharpe, Kamara, Daley, Tucker, Landino, Fisher, Hardy, Jones, Wheeler, Brady, Baldwin Jr, Bell, Chandler, Bond, Williams, Jr., Black, Gandy, Boykin, Turner, Radicic, A. Mendoza, Ndukwe, Vanhorse, Staes, Chung, Utzinger, Conner, Clark, McCarthy, Langston, Bomba, Benson, Ajani, Ratcliff, Warren. **OSU:** Montgomery, Siereveld, Daniels, Hinzman, Tshabola, Sayin, Jackson, Klare, Kacmarek, Smith, Tate, Igbinosun, Styles Jr., Mathews Jr., Downs, Curry, Jackson Jr, Malone, McDonald, Styles, Reese, Inniss, Sanchez, Delane, Donaldson Jr, Rodgers, Lockhart, Thurman, Alford, Peoples, Pettijohn, Pierce, Roker, West, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Rudzinski, VanSickle, Padilla, Terry, Moore, Onianwa, Adolph, Roberts, Christian, Houston.

Season Statistics

2025 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Aug. 30	(3) TEXAS (1)	W, 14-7	107,524
Sept. 6	(1) GRAMBLING STATE	W, 70-0	100,624
Sept. 13	(1) OHIO	W, 37-9	105,765
Sept. 27	(1) at Washington	W, 24-6	72,458
Oct. 4	(1) MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	105,114
Oct. 11	(1) at Illinois (17)	W, 34-16	60,670
Oct. 18	(1) at Wisconsin	W, 37-0	72,795
Nov. 1	(1) PENN STATE	W, 38-14	105,517
Nov. 8	(1) at Purdue	W, 34-10	57,701
Nov. 15	(1) UCLA	W, 48-10	104,168
Nov. 22	(1) RUTGERS	W, 42-9	100,023
Nov. 29	(1) at Michigan (15)	W, 27-9	111,373
Dec. 6	(1) Indiana (2)	L, 13-10	68,214

OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	299	166
Rushing	118	69
Passing	165	77
Penalty	16	20
Average Per Game/Rush	162.8	84.5
Average Per Game/Pass	266.8	129.1
Total Offense	558.4	277.6
Total Plays	824	704
Average Per Game	429.5	213.5
Average Per Play	6.8	3.9
Penalties-Yards	56-529	50-395
Fumbles-Lost	7-3	8-6
Third Down Efficiency	78-141	47-162
Percentage	55%	29%
Fourth Down Efficiency	11-16	10-27
Percentage	69%	37%
Sacks-Yards	33-224	11-68
Time Of Possession Avg.	33:37	26:21

Score								
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.	
Ohio State	92	137	111	114	0	454	34.9	
Opponents	15	32	30	29	0	106	8.2	

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Bo Jackson	168	1035	6.2	5	64
James Peoples	61	344	5.6	3	49
CJ Donaldson Jr.	89	330	3.7	10	27
Isaiah West	59	310	5.3	2	38
Lincoln Kienholz	11	66	6.0	2	22
Jeremiah Smith	2	20	10.0	1	17
Brandon Inniss	3	16	5.3	0	8
Carnell Tate	2	16	8.0	0	8
Sam Dixon	3	9	3.0	1	6
Nate Roberts	2	1	0.5	0	1
Julian Sayin	37	-2	-0.1	0	12
Team	14	-29	-2.1	0	0
OSU Totals	451	2116	4.7	24	64
OPP Totals	388	1098	2.8	4	37

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Julian Sayin	279	356	78.4	3323	31-6	182.1
L. Kienholz	11	14	78.6	139	1-0	185.5
Tavien St. Clair	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
Brandon Inniss	1	1	100.0	6	0-0	150.4
OSU Totals	291	373	78.0	3468	32-6	181.2
OPP Totals	189	316	59.8	1678	6-8	105.6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	80	1086	13.6	11	87
Carnell Tate	48	838	17.5	9	57
Max Klare	43	448	10.4	2	39
Brandon Inniss	32	237	7.4	3	29
Bo Jackson	19	200	10.5	1	23
Will Kacmarek	12	140	11.7	2	47
CJ Donaldson Jr.	10	65	6.5	1	14
James Peoples	10	50	5.0	0	12
Jelani Thurman	7	84	12.0	1	26
Bryson Rodgers	6	79	13.2	1	21
Mylan Graham	6	93	15.5	0	23
Bennett Christian	5	16	3.2	1	6
Quincy Porter	4	59	14.8	0	22
Nate Roberts	4	30	7.5	0	15
David Adolph	3	31	10.3	0	14
Isaiah West	2	12	6.0	0	12
OSU Totals	291	3468	11.9	32	87
OPP Totals	189	1678	8.9	6	67

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	54-54	-	-	16-19	102
Jeremiah Smith	12	-	-	-	-	72
CJ Donaldson Jr.	11	-	-	-	-	66

Carnell Tate	9	-	-	-	-	54
Bo Jackson	6	-	-	-	-	36
James Peoples	3	-	-	-	-	18
Brandon Inniss	3	-	-	-	-	18
Will Kacmarek	2	-	-	-	-	12
Lincoln Kienholz	2	-	-	-	-	12
Max Klare	2	-	-	-	-	12
Isaiah West	2	-	-	-	-	12
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jelani Thurman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Bryson Rodgers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Sam Dixon	1	-	-	-	-	6
Riley Pettijohn	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jackson Courville	-	4-4	-	-	-	4
OSU Totals	58	58-58	-	-	-	16-19 454
OPP Totals	10	7-8	-	-	-	13-16 106

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	6-7	7-8	3-3	0-1	16-19
OSU Totals	6-7	7-8	3-3	0-1	16-19
OPP Totals	6-6	2-4	5-6	0-0	13-16

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	24	1008	42.0	0	55
Nick McLarty	1	45	45.0	0	45
OSU Totals	25	1053	42.1	0	55
OPP Totals	66	2949	44.7	1	65

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
J. Mathews Jr.	2	28	14.0	0	23
Davison Igbinosun	2	2	1.0	0	2
Caleb Downs	2	0	0.0	0	0
Payton Pierce	1	15	15.0	0	15
Sonny Styles	1	5	5.0	0	5
OSU Totals	8	50	6.3	0	23
OPP Totals	6	16	2.7	0	12

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	16	178	11.1	0	32
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	1	36	36.0	0	36
Caden Curry	1	0	0.0	0	0
Jeremiah Smith	1	-6	-6.0	0	0
OSU Totals	19	208	10.9	0	36
OPP Totals	2	7	3.5	0	4

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	5	66	13.2	0	37
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	2	116	58.0	1	100
OSU Totals	7	184	26.3	1	100
OPP Totals	16	266	16.6	0	41

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Sonny Styles	45	35	80	5.0-10	0.5-3
Arvell Reese	31	31	62	10.0-45	6.5-41
Caden Curry	36	24	60	16.5-79	11.0-72
Caleb Downs	40	20	60	5.0-13	1.0-8
Kayden McDonald	28	29	57	8.0-28	3.0-20
Jaylen McClain	40	10	50	0-0	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	24	19	43	0.5-0	0-0
Payton Pierce	21	20	41	1.5-2	0-0
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	18	12	30	1.5-1	0-0
K. Jackson Jr.	16	11	27	11.0-57	6.5-45
Tywayne Malone	11	14	25	0-0	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	15	5	20	1.5-7	1.0-6
Will Smith Jr.	9	9	18	0-0	0-0
Eddrick Houston	5	11	16	2.5-12	1.5-10
Devin Sanchez	10	3	13	0-0	0-0
Zion Grady	7	5	12	2.0-12	1.0-10
Faheem Delane	6	6	12	1.0-1	0-0
Beau Atkinson	3	8	11	2.5-12	1.0-9
Aaron Scott Jr.	7	2	9	1.0-5	0-0
Riley Pettijohn	3	6	9	1.0-1	0-0
Bryce West	6	3	9	0-0	0-0
Leroy Roker	5	2	7	0-0	0-0
C.J. Hicks	2	4	6	1.0-1	0-0
Jason Moore	1	5	6	1.0-1	0-0
TJ Alford	3	3	6	1.0-2	0-0
Garrett Stover	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	1	2	3	0-0	0-0
Carnell Tate	3	-	3	0-0	0-0
Logan George	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Eli Lee	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Eric Mensah	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Malik Hartford	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Epi Sitanilei	-	1	1	0.5-0	0-0
Jarquez Carter	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Nate Roberts	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Dominic Kirks	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joey Velazquez	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
James Peoples	1	-	1	0-0	0-0

George's Milestone Marred By Loss To U-M

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is celebrating the 30th anniversary of Eddie George's 1995 Heisman Trophy win this season with a game-by-game look at his march to college football's most coveted award. In this issue BSB looks at Ohio State's 31-23 loss to Michigan on Nov 25, 1995, in Ann Arbor, Mich.

By MIKE WACHSMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There were precious few occasions during the 1995 football season when Eddie George was not the best running back on the field. He churned out yardage at a prodigious pace and put himself front and center in the race for the Heisman Trophy.

But on a cold, gray late November afternoon, he was upstaged by a back with a funny name who ended up having the last laugh.

George had one of his lower rushing totals of the season, netting 104 yards on 21 carries against a Michigan defense that was the best in the Big Ten. He was outdone by Wolverine running back Tim Biakabutuka, who rolled into the record books with a 313-yard day. His production was instrumental in Michigan's 31-23 victory, a win which knocked the Buckeyes out of contention for the Rose Bowl.

"It most definitely hurts," George said. "All the hard work we've done didn't pay off today. Michigan was the better team. We have no reason to hang our heads, but right now it's just very disappointing."

It was more of the same for Ohio State, which had lost five of the previous seven meetings in The Game. This one was a bit more creative in finding ways to lose, as there were uncharacteristic drops by the receivers, and the defense, which had been coming along as the season progressed, looked like grade-schoolers chasing a professional every time Biakabutuka broke into the clear.

When an opponent gashes you on the ground, it is extra painful, as that speaks to toughness and physicality. On this day, the Buckeyes had little of either on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

"We just didn't win the war in the trenches, period," George said. "We missed some opportunities, dropped some balls, failed on some protections, and didn't tackle. Those things catch up with you, and you just can't do things like that against a team like Michigan."

George did his part to keep the Buckeyes in the game, catching screens and relying on his usual power approach to churn out yards three and four at a time. But a rare mistake on third-and-goal from the Michigan 4-yard line at the beginning of the second quarter resulted in OSU settling for a field goal instead of a touchdown, when six points could have changed the tenor of the game.

George took a handoff and looked ready to find pay dirt but slipped on the muddy turf and was met for no gain by U-M's William Carr.

"I think they gave us a look there where



FILE PHOTO

NOT GOOD ENOUGH — Even though Eddie George (27) ran for 104 yards and a touchdown to set the Ohio State season rushing record, the Buckeyes' 31-23 loss to Michigan prevented a trip to the Rose Bowl.

if we go out and get the middle linebacker on that play, Eddie walks into the end zone," quarterback Bobby Hoying said.

The Buckeyes settled for a 21-yard Josh Jackson field goal and got a 37-yarder from Jackson as time wound down at the end of the first half, and they went into halftime trailing 10-9. On one hand, they were disappointed about playing such a sloppy game, but on the other they had some confidence in that they trailed by just one point with the miscues.

Michigan went up 17-9 just under five minutes into the third quarter on a touchdown run by quarterback Brian Griese, but then George redeemed himself late in the third quarter by leaping over the top for a touchdown that trimmed the deficit to 17-15. George was stopped a foot short of the goal line on a two-point conversion with 1:14 remaining in the frame to keep the deficit at two.

Michigan scored twice in the fourth quarter to push the margin to 31-15, but the Buckeyes stayed within hailing distance on a touchdown toss from Hoying to Buster Tillman with 6:33 remaining. George caught a two-point conversion to make the deficit 31-23, leaving some time for possible late-game heroics.

They were not to be, however, as Michi-

gan whittled the clock down to 2:01 before punting it back to the Buckeyes.

Hoying completed three passes for 29 yards to move the ball to the Wolverines' 34-yard line but, devoid of timeouts, was forced to spike the ball with 1:14 left to play. A pair of incompletions set up a must-have fourth down, and the attack was blunted when Charles Woodson soared over Terry Glenn to intercept the ball and close out the game.

It was a small consolation, but George tied Ohio State's single-season rushing record in the game on an 8-yard gain on the first play of the second quarter. He broke it one play later on another 8-yard burst and finished the regular season with 1,826 yards, shattering the mark of 1,764 set by Keith Byars in 1984.

Records are hollow when set during a loss, and George was understandably more focused on the outcome of the game. He vowed redemption in the Citrus Bowl, Ohio State's postseason destination.

"This is something I'm going to have to shake in a few hours," George said. "We've got a game to get ready for, and that's about it. We've been very successful until this point, and we're just going to have to tighten it up and go back."

When asked whether the Buckeyes'

loss might have loosened his grip on the Heisman Trophy, George said, "That doesn't matter to me right now. I'm not too focused on it right now because I'm hurting and we lost."

George was disconsolate after the game, feeling that so much of Ohio State's hard work was negated by another loss to Michigan. The Wolverines were John Cooper's perpetual stumbling block, and this loss dropped his record against the Buckeyes' rival to 1-6-1.

Winning everything up to this point was all fine and good, but an inability to finish the job definitely left an indelible stain on the Buckeyes' season.

"The 11 wins, all that did was put us in position to win the Big Ten," George said. "It just wasn't meant to be for us. We've accomplished so much as a team, and it hurts right now, but we have so much to look forward to and to be proud of."

Reporters were looking for something sensational from George after the game, but even though he was dejected, he was still his usual thoughtful, introspective, measured self. He was ready to offer congratulations to the winner and positivity to his side, especially with one game left on the docket.

The loss sent the Buckeyes to Orlando and the Citrus Bowl, where they were set to take on the Tennessee Volunteers on New Year's Day of 1996.

That extra game would be a shot at redemption for George and his Buckeyes, and it wasn't long before his visage changed to one of focus and excitement for what was ahead.

"Right now, my life goes on," George said. "I graduate. I can say I beat these guys (Michigan) at least once. I didn't get to go to the Rose Bowl, but there's more to life than winning and losing. I just have to realize we have one more game and I have to give it my best."

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Hartline Leaves OSU With Big Shoes To Fill

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Ohio State offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline entered Columbus as a graduate assistant in 2017, he did so having plenty of experience in the NFL but no experience as a coach.

In the nine years he spent in Columbus, Hartline worked himself up to become one of the best assistant coaches in the country, and for the first time in his coaching career, he even proved he could lead a capable offense as a play-caller this season.

On Dec. 3, however, it was announced that Hartline would leave Ohio State after the end of the season to become South Florida's head coach.

Widely regarded as one of the best recruiters in the country and an elite developer of wide receiver talent, Hartline's departure will leave the Buckeyes with a sizable hole in their coaching staff.

"It'd be hard to evaluate (Hartline's tenure) as anything other than a spectacular success, particularly with what he's done at the wide receiver position," said Eleven Warriors deputy editor Dan Hope. "Just looking at the names that he recruited and developed over the course of his tenure, from Chris Olave to Garrett Wilson to Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Egbuka, Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate.

"I don't think there's been any question that in his eight years at Ohio State, he has been the best wide receivers coach in college football. In terms of the high-octane passing offenses we've seen for most of Ryan Day's tenure, Brian Hartline and what he has done with the wide receiver group has been an enormous part of that."

With Hartline being set to take over at South Florida and on the way out at Ohio State, BSB sat down with Hope, recruiting expert Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop and 247Sports' Steve Helwagen to assess how much Hartline's departure will affect the Buckeyes.

Hartline Makes OSU 'Receiver U'

Although he's done an impressive job leading Ohio State's offense in 2025, Hartline will likely be best remembered for his work as the wide receivers coach. Hartline, who was only the program's wide receivers coach from 2018-22, has remained the leader of the Buckeyes' receivers since being promoted to offensive coordinator in 2023.

It's impossible to talk about Hartline's tenure as the receivers coach at Ohio State



FILE PHOTO

HEADING SOUTH — Offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was named head coach for South Florida on Dec. 3 but will still work with Ohio State through the postseason. He is considered the best receivers coach in the country, and his recruiting success will be hard to duplicate.

without talking about his recruiting prowess.

During his time at Ohio State, Hartline helped sign five five-star receivers — Wilson, Smith-Njigba, Egbuka, Smith and Julian Fleming. He also signed several other highly touted top-100 prospects, such as Tate, Brandon Inniss and Harrison, to name a few.

According to Greene, it's hard to overstate Hartline's abilities as a recruiter.

"You look at the guys he brought in, and they speak for themselves," said Greene. "Had he stayed at Ohio State, would they have kept (four-star wide receiver) Kayden Dixon-Wyatt? I don't know that, but maybe. Then, if you look at the production, if you look at the guys in the NFL, look at the guys on the field right now, he was the top recruiting assistant in the country, in my opinion."

It's easy to see why young receivers would want to play for Hartline. Helwagen noted that the former Buckeye not only boasted plenty of NFL experience but proved he could develop receivers at a high level early on in his coaching career.

"When you have an All-America receiver

every year, people take notice of that," Helwagen said. "They've had two All-Americans in some years, maybe a first-team guy and a second- or third-team guy. That just tells you, right there, what they were able to do at Ohio State. With Hartline, I think he's been the main attraction for that. He is such a personable guy, builds relationships very easily with people, and did a great job in that regard. And he's going to be missed at Ohio State."

In some ways, it was revealed how much Hartline truly meant to Ohio State's wide receiver recruiting this year.

Hartline's move to South Florida was reported on the same day that the early signing period opened and within hours of the initial reports, Dixon-Wyatt flipped from Ohio State to USC and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) and Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-3, 190) postponed their respective signings.

The Buckeyes managed to avoid disaster, despite the announcement of Hartline's impending departure, and eventually signed both Henry and Guilford.

Although it may not have looked good that several skill position players nearly flipped from Ohio State, Hope said Hartline's decision to take the USF job didn't have too much of a negative impact on the Buckeyes' 2026 class.

"I don't really think that his departure played a role in the players they actually lost," Hope said. "I think Dixon-Wyatt was already going to flip to USC, even if that didn't happen. That had kind of been bubbling up for a few weeks.

"I think the one thing it did tangibly was it led to Chris Henry Jr. delaying his signing

by a couple of days. But ultimately, Ohio State still closed the deal with Chris Henry Jr. and Guilford. I think in terms of who Ohio State signed in the 2026 class, in the end, the results ended up being the same as they would have been even without Brian Hartline getting hired on signing day."

As good as Hartline was at recruiting the receiver position, Greene is somewhat skeptical that Ohio State's receiver recruiting will take much of a dip because of the program's history at recruiting the position.

"They have the brand going for them No. 1, and that comes down from Ryan Day," Greene said. "Now, who are they going to hire? Who's taking Hartline's job? Whoever it is, you're going to point to Marvin Harrison Jr., and all the rest of them. Look at the history of who Ohio State develops here. It's an easy position to recruit for. If you're an assistant coach, all you have to do is point to the NFL guys. Now, Brian was the best there was, so maybe an inch (of a dip), but not miles."

As good a recruiter as Hartline was, it still takes a good coach to make sure the talented players play up to their potential. That's exactly what Hartline did at Ohio State.

Outside of Fleming, who transferred out of Ohio State after four disappointing seasons with the program, all of Hartline's five-star recruits became All-Big Ten receivers at Ohio State, and Smith-Njigba and Smith were both named All-Americans at one point in their respective Buckeye careers. Harrison was not a five-star recruit, but he was as productive as any of Hartline's receivers and was a two-time unanimous All-American.

"Talent comes in with guys like Marvin Harrison Jr. and Jeremiah Smith," Helwagen said. "Emeka Egbuka was a national top-10 player as well, and those guys committed at a certain level. I think in each case, Brian Hartline has helped them take their game to even a higher level than where they were as high school players. They became great college players, so that's a tremendous feather in his cap. That's a level of development that is very rare when you think about what they were able to do at that position. I think all eyes will be on whoever gets that job in the future to see if they have what it takes to take your diamond in the rough, maybe like a Chris Olave, and turn them into a first-round draft pick."

Hartline Does Solid Job As Play Caller

Although Hartline was first promoted to offensive coordinator before the 2023 season, he earned play-calling duties only this season. He wasn't always perfect in his first year as a play caller, but for the most part, it was hard to argue with the results he was able to achieve.

Even after it had a poor showing in its 13-10 loss in the Big Ten championship to Indiana, Ohio State's offense ranked No. 18 in the country, averaging 34.9 points per game.

"Obviously, right now we sit here after a rough game against Indiana, that's kind of where a lot of the attention is right now, but I think overall, he's done well," Hope said.

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"I don't know that he's done spectacularly. Only being in that role for one year makes it difficult to truly evaluate how good he is as an offensive coordinator and as an offensive play caller.

"Where you have to give him credit is, they had a first-year starting quarterback who had never really played before at the collegiate level, and he's a Heisman Trophy finalist. He might break the NCAA record for completion percentage. So certainly, Ohio State has done a lot of things right, particularly in the passing game on offense this year."

As Hope mentioned, the former NFL receiver led an offense that seemed to be at its best with its passing attack. With Hartline leading the offense, Julian Sayin was undoubtedly one of the best quarterbacks in the country, but Ohio State's running game struggled to find consistency throughout the season.

Following the Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State ranked No. 64 nationally, averaging just 162.8 rushing yards per game. The Buckeyes' struggles on the ground proved costly in their loss to Indiana when they scored only 10 points in four trips in the red zone.

Against the Hoosiers, Ohio State had arguably its worst offensive performance of the season. With the Big Ten Championship Game being played only a few days after it was announced that Hartline had taken the South Florida job, some wondered if his busy week affected his ability to game-plan and call plays against the Hoosiers.

"He admitted in his interview session on (Dec. 9) after he was introduced at South Florida that the week was a hard week for him, that he was getting pulled in so many different directions that he couldn't fully focus on any one thing," Hope said. "It's not like Ohio State was able to look ahead to that Big Ten Championship Game. They were coming off this incredibly emotional win over Michigan, a game that they had invested so much in. Now you've really got a week to prepare for one of the best defenses in the country, and your offensive coordinator gets hired as a head coach in the middle of the week, and he's got to do stuff for that.

"He's going to try to sign a class at his new school on signing day, the same day he gets hired as head coach, all the while trying to help Ohio State prepare for the Big Ten Championship Game. To think that didn't have an impact on him and his ability to do the offensive coordinator job to the best of his ability, I think it would probably be naive to think that it didn't have some effect, because there was just so much going on."

Some fans grew more restless with Hartline staying on as the team's offensive coordinator and play-caller because he went down to USF after Ohio State's loss to Indiana. However, Helwagen said he doesn't have a problem with Hartline staying on the staff as long as Day approves.

"I think if Ryan Day is uncomfortable with the situation, then it would be incumbent on him to make a switch, and at this point, that has not happened," Helwagen said on Dec. 9. "So that tells me that Ryan Day trusts him implicitly, and that he believes that Hartline is going to put him in a position again to win the national championship. It's impossible to tell what the future holds. He's certainly going to have his hands full. I don't think there was anything to him going down there at this point. There are no practices going on right now. At this point, they may start early next week, perhaps, or the week after.

"I don't even know what their practice schedule is going to be right now, but the team's not on the field, so it's not a case where he's missing practice time to go and take care of things down at South Florida, but he does have to hire a staff. The longer this lingers, it's going to be that much more difficult to take time out of his day with Ohio State to interview people to be assistant coaches and staff members down there. He's probably got 30 people he needs to hire."

Hope said he thinks it's best for the Buckeyes to stick with Hartline, because that's what they have grown accustomed to.

"If Brian Hartline is not going to be the one calling the plays, then who's it going to be?" Hope said. "You're not going to bring Chip Kelly or someone else in off the street to call plays. The only other person on the

offensive staff who really has a lot of experience calling plays is Ryan Day. There's been kind of that whole talk in the past about, do you want Ryan Day – even though he's a great offensive mind – calling plays, taking him away from being a full head coach? I think that Brian Hartline remaining with the team for the rest of the season is the best thing for Ohio State."

Bailey Could Lead Receivers

With Hartline out the door, Ohio State will have to replace its third coordinator in the last two years after the season and will also have to find a new wide receivers coach. According to Helwagen, Ohio State could look at promoting a couple of assistants already on staff to replace Hartline as the program's receivers coach.

"They've had (offensive program assistant) Devin Jordan, who's a former player there at Ohio State and has kind of been Hartline's primary assistant with the wide receivers group," Helwagen said. "Keenan Bailey was a guy who was involved with wide receivers previously, and now he's the tight ends coach. They could very easily move him to wide receivers coach. He does a bang-up job in terms of recruiting, and they could put tight ends up, perhaps for somebody else. You also have the situation with the offensive coordinator job.

"Do you hire somebody who comes in, maybe as the coordinator and the tight ends coach, and Keenan moves over to wide receivers, or Keenan stays as a co-coordinator? I guess it's all to be determined by Ryan Day. I don't think they want to lose Keenan Bailey as part of this transaction. He's done a great job in the time that he's been elevated to full-time assistant."

It could be weeks before a coach is officially named the new receivers coach, but Hope said Day will have plenty of options to choose from.

"It's Ohio State, so the expectation is going to be, whoever holds that position is going to have the best receivers in the country," Hope said. "(General manager) Mark Pantoni made the comment on signing day that, 'I'm sure Coach Day has 50 missed

calls from the best receivers coaches in the country who want to come here.' Whether Ohio State goes with an internal promotion, maybe moving someone like Keenan Bailey into the receiver room, or they go hire a receivers coach somewhere else, the expectation should be, whoever is in that position should be one of the best receivers coaches in the country, and therefore their receiver room should be one of the best receiver rooms in the country."

When asked about potential offensive coordinator replacements, Hope mentioned a couple of names who have NFL experience, including Kelly, who served as Ohio State's offensive coordinator for the 2024 season.

Kelly was the Buckeyes' play-caller last year and helped guide the team to a national championship. He was the Las Vegas Raiders' offensive coordinator this year, but after they got out to a 2-9 start, he was fired.

Hope also said that Brian Daboll could be considered for Ohio State's vacant offensive coordinator job. Daboll was the New York Giants' head coach from 2022-25 but was also fired midway through the season after the Giants went 2-8.

At USF, Hartline will take over for fellow Buckeye alum Alex Golesh, who led USF to a 23-15 record during three seasons as the head coach. Golesh recently accepted Auburn's head coaching position.

Hope said it's hard to predict exactly how Hartline will do in his first stint as a head coach, but he thinks his potential is high.

"I think that recruiting is going to be a strength for him," Hope said. "I think that because of how well-recognized he is as a receivers coach, and everything he accomplished at Ohio State, I think he will be able to get some recruits there to USF who would not typically go to USF. I think that's going to be a big advantage for him.

"In terms of actually running a program, I don't know, because he hasn't done it before. You really just don't know with someone being a head coach for the first time how they will do in that role, but I certainly think the upside is very high. If I were a USF fan, I would be very excited about the hire."



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U-M's Moore Fired, Charged With Three Crimes

A shocking chain of events began when Michigan fired head football coach Sherrone Moore on Dec. 10. In a statement released by Michigan, athletic director Warde Manuel said that the university found credible evidence that Moore engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a Michigan staffer. Moore was then detained by police in

**BIG TEN
NOTES**

Sam Cipriani

Saline, Mich., in the afternoon following his firing before he was turned in to the Pittsfield Township police, where he was arrested and booked that night in the Washtenaw County Jail for investigation into potential charges. During Moore's arraignment on the morning of Dec. 12, the former Michigan head coach was charged with home invasion, a third-degree felony, as well as misdemeanor stalking and entering without permission. According to the prosecutor, the woman Moore reportedly had relations with broke up with him the morning of Dec. 8 before coming forward to Michigan regents regarding their relationship.

Following Moore's firing in the afternoon of Dec. 10, he reportedly went into the woman's house, where he grabbed butter knives and scissors and threatened to hurt the victim and himself, the victim reported. Moore's attorney, Joseph Simon, told local counsel that "(Moore) is 39 years old, zero prior criminal history, zero contact with the criminal justice system ... there's no evidence to suggest he's a threat to public safety." Magistrate Odetalla M. Odetalla ruled that Moore must continue his treatment for mental health, avoid contact with the victim, and refrain from the use of alcohol, marijuana or any nonprescribed substances while he's out on bond. Moore, who took over for Jim Harbaugh after he departed the program to go to the NFL, led the Wolverines to an 8-5 record in 2024 and a 9-3 record in the regular season this year. Moore led Michigan to a 13-10 upset over Ohio State last season, but in what will be his last game coaching the Wolverines, his team lost to the Buckeyes 27-9 this season. Michigan is set to face Texas in the Citrus Bowl on Dec. 31. Associate head coach Biff Poggi will serve as the team's interim head coach in the game.

U-M To Investigate Athletic Department

In the aftermath of Moore's firing and arrest, Michigan announced that it will be undergoing a full investigation into "the practices and culture" of the athletic department. Manuel met with university regents on Dec. 11 to discuss the state of the athletic department and the events that occurred regarding Moore. Multiple sources reported that the investigation will primarily look into the scandal



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOOSIER HEISMAN WINNER — Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza was announced as the winner of the Heisman Trophy on Dec. 13, one week after the Hoosiers defeated Ohio State 13-10 in the Big Ten Championship Game to earn the No. 1 seed in the College Football Playoff with a 13-0 record. OSU quarterback Julian Sayin finished fourth in the Heisman voting.

with Moore and any potential cover-up from Manuel or the athletic department. According to The Detroit News, Jenner & Block, a Chicago-based law firm that has worked with the school in recent years, will conduct the investigation. During the fall, the firm reportedly investigated Moore after it received an anonymous tip about his improper relationship with the staffer.

IU's Mendoza Wins Heisman

For the first time ever, Indiana is home to the Heisman Trophy winner. Following a dominant season in which he led Indiana to a perfect 13-0 record and its first-ever Big Ten Championship Game win, quarterback Fernando Mendoza was honored with the Heisman Trophy as college football's most outstanding player on Dec. 13 in New York City. In 13 games with Indiana this season, Mendoza has been a difference maker for the Hoosiers, completing 226 of 316 passes (71.5 percent) this season for 2,980 yards. The junior quarterback also tossed 33 touchdown passes compared to six interceptions, while adding 69 carries for 240 yards and six scores on the ground. Mendoza was 15 of 23 for 222 yards with one touchdown and an interception during Indiana's 13-10 win over Ohio State in the conference title game in Indianapolis on Dec. 6. The Miami native has thrown four or

more touchdown passes in a game five separate times this season, crossing the mark of 300 passing yards once (332) against Michigan State on Oct. 18. Prior to his time with the Hoosiers, Mendoza spent two seasons as the starting quarterback at Cal, where he totaled 4,712 passing yards on a 66.5 completion percentage, 30 touchdowns and 16 interceptions. Mendoza beat out the other three finalists — Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin, Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia and Notre Dame running back Jeremiah Love — for the award. After a perfect season to date, Mendoza and Indiana earned the No. 1 overall seed in the College Football Playoff, and the Hoosiers will face the winner of No. 8 Oklahoma and No. 9 Alabama in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

PSU Hires Campbell As Next HC

Following a coaching search that lasted 54 days, Penn State found the successor to former head coach James Franklin. Penn State hired Iowa State head coach Matt Campbell for the same role with the Nittany Lions on Dec. 9. "I am incredibly honored to join Penn State University as its next head football coach," Campbell said. "This is one of the blue bloods of college football, and this program's history and tradition are unmatched. I look forward to building on that founda-

BIG

2025 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	9	0	1.000	13	0	1.000
Ohio State	9	0	1.000	12	1	0.923
Oregon	8	1	0.889	11	1	0.917
Michigan	7	2	0.778	9	3	0.750
USC	7	2	0.778	9	3	0.750
Iowa	6	3	0.667	8	4	0.667
Washington	5	4	0.556	8	4	0.667
Illinois	5	4	0.556	8	4	0.667
Minnesota	5	4	0.556	7	5	0.583
Nebraska	4	5	0.444	7	5	0.583
Northwestern	4	5	0.444	6	6	0.500
UCLA	3	6	0.333	3	9	0.250
Penn State	3	6	0.333	6	6	0.500
Rutgers	2	7	0.222	5	7	0.417
Wisconsin	2	7	0.222	4	8	0.333
Maryland	1	8	0.111	4	8	0.333
Michigan State	1	8	0.111	4	8	0.333
Purdue	0	9	0.000	2	10	0.167

Dec. 6 Game

Indiana 13, **Ohio State** 10

All times Eastern

* Big Ten Championship Game, Indianapolis

tion by developing student-athletes on and off the field, competing for championships, and continuing the legacy of excellence that defines Penn State." Campbell spent the last decade at the helm of Iowa State, posting a 72-55 record with two Big 12 title game appearances (2020, 2024), a 2021 Fiesta Bowl win and an 11-win season in 2024. Before his time with the Cyclones, Campbell spent four years at Toledo from 2012-15, where he racked up a 35-15 record over four seasons, bringing the Rockets to back-to-back MAC championship games in 2014-15. Penn State had just one losing season under Franklin (4-5 in the COVID year of 2020), with the program posting a 104-45 record during his time there. Prior to landing on Campbell, Penn State also looked at Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule, Jeff Brohm of Louisville, Kalani Sataki of BYU, and former James Madison and now-UCLA head coach Bob Chesney. According to On3, Penn State's head coaching search has netted its then-potential candidates a whopping \$370.8 million in earnings.

B1G Players Enter Portal

Multiple Big Ten stars will be finding new homes for the 2026 season. Nebraska quarterback Dylan Raiola headlines the group of players slated to enter the transfer portal this offseason, announcing the decision on Dec. 15. The sophomore passer threw for 2,000 yards and 18 touchdowns with just six interceptions in nine games this season before he went down with a broken fibula in a 21-17 loss to USC on Nov. 1. Raiola completed 69.1 percent of his passes for 4,819 yards and 31 touchdowns over his two-year career with the Cornhuskers.

BIG Conference Bowl Matchups

L.A. Dec. 13 • 8 p.m. ABC  Boise State 10 vs. Washington 38	CFP First Round Dec. 20 • 7:30 p.m. TNT  James Madison (12-1) at Oregon (11-1)	GameAbove Sports Dec. 26 • 1 p.m. ESPN  Central Michigan (7-5) vs. Northwestern (6-6)	Rate Dec. 26 • 4:30 p.m. ESPN  New Mexico (9-3) vs. Minnesota (7-5)	Pinstripe Dec. 27 • 12 p.m. ABC  Penn State (6-6) vs. Clemson (7-5)
Music City Dec. 30 • 5:30 p.m. ESPN  Tennessee (8-4) vs. Illinois (8-4)	Alamo Dec. 30 • 9 p.m. ESPN  USC (9-3) vs. TCU (8-4)	ReliaQuest Dec. 31 • Noon ESPN  Iowa (8-4) vs. Vanderbilt (10-2)	Citrus Dec. 31 • 3 p.m. ABC  Michigan (9-3) vs. Texas (9-3)	Las Vegas Dec. 31 • 3:30 p.m. ESPN  Nebraska (7-5) vs. Utah (10-2)
Cotton (CFP Quarterfinal) Dec. 31 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  Ohio State (12-1) vs. TBD	Rose (CFP Quarterfinal) Jan. 1 • 4 p.m. ESPN  Indiana (13-0) vs. TBD			

Michigan State is also out its starting quarterback with junior Aidan Chiles announcing his decision to enter the transfer portal just before Raiola on Dec. 15.

Chiles transferred to Michigan State in 2023, following head coach Jonathan Smith after he was hired from Oregon State. In two seasons with the Spartans, Chiles completed 320 of 526 passes for 3,807 yards, 23 touchdowns and 14 interceptions.

Also entering the transfer portal at Michigan State is wide receiver Nick Marsh. A sophomore wideout, Marsh was the Spartans' top target in 2025, hauling in 59 catches for 662 yards and six touchdowns.

Wisconsin linebacker Christian Alliegro is also entering the transfer portal after three seasons with the Badgers. In 2025, the junior totaled 53 tackles, the third-best mark on the Wisconsin defense, as well as four sacks and a pass defended. Alliegro totaled 124 tackles and eight sacks over his three-year career at Wisconsin.

The transfer portal doesn't open until Jan. 2, and there will be only one window this year as opposed to past offseasons when there was a winter window that opened in December and a spring window that opened in May.

UCLA Hires JMU's Chesney As HC

Over two months after UCLA fired former head coach Deshaun Foster on Sept. 14 following an 0-3 start, the Bruins' head coaching search has officially ended.

UCLA hired Chesney for the same role with the Bruins, replacing interim head coach Tim Skipper, who went 3-6 over his nine games as acting head coach and was

hired by Cal Poly to be the head coach on Dec. 3.

Chesney's contract with UCLA is worth \$6.75 million per year over five years. The signing of Chesney comes after a 3-9 record for UCLA.

In two seasons at James Madison, Chesney accrued a 21-5 record, improving upon his 9-4 record from the 2024 season while leading the Dukes to a 12-1 season in 2025 that featured a 31-14 victory in the Sun Belt conference championship over Troy on Dec. 5.

Chesney previously was the head coach at Salve Regina of Division III (2010-12), Assumption of Division II (2013-17), and Division I FCS Holy Cross (2018-23).

As a head coach, Chesney has had only one season with a losing record, earning at least nine wins in eight of his 16 seasons.

U-M Swaps Special Teams Coaches

Following Michigan's 27-9 loss to Ohio State in the Big House on Nov. 27, the Wolverines have fired special teams coordinator JB Brown and replaced him with a familiar face for Buckeye fans.

After firing Brown, Michigan hired former Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs as its next special teams coordinator.

After evaluating the Wolverines' performance throughout the season, then-Michigan head coach Moore said the team felt that parting ways with Brown was the best move for the program.

"After thoroughly evaluating our special teams' performance throughout the season, I made the decision to make a change that

was in the best interest of the program," Moore said.

Since it was Moore who hired Coombs before the head coach was fired by U-M, Coombs' status is unknown with the new coach.

Brown was in his second year as Michigan's special teams coordinator. He formerly spent three seasons as an analyst from 2021-23.

Coombs spent the previous two seasons at Cincinnati as the program's cornerbacks coach and special teams coordinator. He lost his only game as the Bearcats' interim head coach after then-head coach Luke Fickell departed for Wisconsin.

Coombs previously served as Ohio State's defensive coordinator from 2020-21, its cornerbacks coach from 2012-17, and its special teams coordinator from 2013-17. He also spent two seasons in the NFL as the Tennessee Titans' defensive backs coach from 2018-19.

Williamses Donate \$401 Million To MSU

Following the end of Michigan State's 2025-26 season, the Spartans' athletic department has received its largest single commitment in the history of the university.

The \$401 million donation was given by Greg and Dawn Williams for the school's "Uncommon Will, Far Better World" campaign in support of MSU Athletics' FOR SPARTA initiative. The previous largest donation to Michigan State was just \$32 million. The athletic department will receive

\$290 million.

The couple expressed their allegiance to Michigan State, adding that the donation reflects their deep-rooted connection to the university and the East Lansing community.

"This commitment reflects our belief that we should give back to our community and to the place we call home," they said. "MSU is not only the face of our community, but the health and well-being of East Lansing depend on a thriving and successful MSU. In this regard, we're proud and blessed to be in a position to support MSU's leadership and its ambitious vision for the future. Some of our family's fondest and most bonding memories revolve around MSU athletics, so these funds are well placed in supporting an institution that contributed so meaningfully to our lives."

Michigan State president Kevin M. Guskiewicz showed his gratitude for the donation, stating the impact that the Williamses' donation will have going forward.

"The commitment that Greg and Dawn are making represents an extraordinary act of generosity and belief in Michigan State University's future," Guskiewicz said. "We are deeply grateful for this historic commitment, which will strengthen our academic mission and support our student-athletes in meaningful, lasting ways. Their investment in both the university and the future of Spartan athletics reflects a bold, shared vision for excellence and innovation. This moment will have a profound impact on generations of Spartans, and we are honored by their confidence in MSU."



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Experts High on OSU's Deep 2026 Class

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the first time since Ryan Day's first season as a head coach, Ohio State is bringing in a recruiting class that isn't in the top five nationally. However, analysts are still impressed with the Buckeyes' class, which is ranked No. 6 according to 247Sports' composite rankings.

There is still some time to go before the 2026 class is finalized, with National Signing Day coming up in February, but Ohio State is off to a strong start following the NCAA's early signing period from Dec. 3-5.

Ohio State signed a total of 27 recruits, including a single five-star prospect in Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), as well as 17 four-star and nine three-star recruits.

Ohio State's sixth-ranked 2026 recruiting class trails only USC, Alabama, Oregon, Notre Dame and Georgia. The Buckeyes' 27 recruits, who average a rating of 91.83 by 247Sports, make Ohio State tied for the nation's 12th-largest class.

Despite the 2026 class lacking multiple five-star headliners or the typical volume of elite national recruits, analysts praised the class for addressing positional needs and adding crucial depth across the roster.

Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop told BSB that Ohio State's approach showed a clear, intentional recruiting strategy that focused on building the Buckeyes' depth and development rather than chasing star power.

"I like the class a lot, and it's a good example that sometimes recruiting rankings can be a little misleading," Greene said. "Assume a school would take the 12 top quarterbacks, sign them all in one class, and then sign the 12 top middle linebackers in one class, and that would be their class. You would end up with a pretty highly rated class. But did you accomplish anything?"

"There's more to it than that. You've got to have a balanced class, and you can't really skip a position group. You're going to take four or five offensive linemen, and just one quarterback, but you've got to hit all those. So that's what I look at. I look at this class, and I think they hit most of their needs, and it's very balanced. So to me, it's a win, even though it's ranked sixth by 247Sports, which doesn't mean anything to me."

247Sports' Allen Trieu expressed a similar sentiment, adding that though Ohio State's class doesn't have the top-five ranking it normally does, the Buckeyes still managed to assemble a deep, balanced group of recruits that fill their roster needs.

"I think it's good, but I know at Ohio State, you expect the top class in the Big Ten and top three classes overall," Trieu said. "So this one's No. 6, and that's the funny thing about the standard that's been set at Ohio State. Six seems like a little bit low when you've been one, two or three, but I still think the class is really, really good."

For the third straight season, Ohio State's class is highlighted by a five-star receiver.

As the first recruit to commit to Ohio State in the class of 2026, doing so on July

29, 2023, most expected Henry, the top-ranked wide receiver and No. 10 overall recruit, to be a shoo-in to Ohio State.

But Henry's signing quickly became complicated after Buckeye offensive coordinator Brian Hartline accepted a position as head coach at South Florida on the morning of the first day of the early signing period.

Following the news of Hartline's departure, Henry took to Twitter, stating that he was "trying to weigh his options due to coaching changes," before listing Oregon, USC, Texas and LSU as his final options, along with the Buckeyes.

However, two days later, Ohio State finally received Henry's long-awaited final commitment, which he announced on "The Pat McAfee Show" on the final day of the early signing period.

Though it took until Dec. 5 for Henry to sign, Greene said the wideout was well worth the wait as he believes the wide receiver will prove to be an elite talent for Ohio State.

"I really like Chris Henry a lot, and I've seen him in person three times now," Greene said. "You hate to use comparisons, and you hate hyperbole, but from a physical point of view, with his height, weight, speed, he could be a combination of Marvin Harrison Jr. and Jeremiah Smith, who is a pretty good football player."

"But Henry's been hurt a lot, and you hate to see that with a high school player. So that would be the only negative with Chris is that he's been hurt with a lot of nagging things, and I hate nagging injuries. But that would be 2 percent of the evaluation. The other 98 percent, he's got a chance to be a superstar."

While Ohio State landed Henry out of Mater Dei, the Buckeyes failed to retain his high school teammate, four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180), who flipped to USC on Dec. 3.

The Buckeyes' only other flip was North Forney, Texas, four-star athlete Legend Bey (5-10, 175), who originally flipped to OSU from Tennessee on Nov. 10 and reportedly wanted to sign with Ohio State before his mother reportedly refused to sign his letter of intent during the early signing period. Read Recruiting Outlook on pages 26-28 for more on Bey's situation.

Despite the losses of four-star recruits Dixon-Wyatt and Bey, Trieu still felt Ohio State brought in the necessary pieces, including Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-3, 190) to fill out its receiver group.

"There's always a lot of movement towards signing day, and there's always schools trying to poach guys, and then you give them the ammunition of a guy like Brian Hartline leaving the staff that could have blown up that very important receiver room," Trieu said. "Chris Henry Jr. was on the verge of picking another school. Jerquaden Guilford was looking around and even pushed his signing back a little bit. So to end up getting those guys back in the boat is huge, because you wouldn't have had any time to replace those two. It would have really hurt the class."

Rounding out Ohio State's 2026 receiver signees is Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HENRY JR.

ABOVE THE REST — Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei's Chris Henry Jr. is the lone five-star recruit in the class of 2026 for Ohio State, but he is expected to be the next great wide receiver for OSU and an eventual high pick in the NFL draft.

Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) and Southlake (Texas) Carroll three-star wide receiver Brock Boyd (6-1, 180), with Trieu believing the latter to be the perfect complementary piece to a star-studded group featuring Henry and Guilford.

Ohio State replenished its receiving corps with four wide receiver signees in the class, but the Buckeyes picked up just one recruit at each of the other three skill positions.

Ohio State's top signee of the three, Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), could make an impact for the Buckeyes early on with a similar skill set to Bo Jackson.

Conversely, Ohio State's other two signees — Mission Viejo, Calif., three-star quarterback Luke Fahey (6-0, 185) and Lebanon, Ohio, three-star tight end Nick Lautar (6-5, 230) — will both be long projects, according to Trieu.

"Obviously, at running back, you've got Bo playing this year as a true freshman, and at quarterback, you just signed Tavien St. Clair, so coming in behind him, it was unlikely they were going to sign another top quarterback again," Trieu said. "If you're not able to get a five-star, top-of-the-board guy, then getting someone like Luke — who's really smart, solid and had a very good high school career — is a good take behind someone like Tavien St. Clair."

"With Nick Lautar, tight end is a position where a lot of three-star guys have turned out well. Max Klare had a very similar profile coming out of high school. He

wasn't a big-time recruit. It's a spot where you can find late bloomers, and that's the case with Nick."

"I think Favour can be a guy like that too, because he's got legitimate speed and just needs a little bit of seasoning."

The Buckeyes also brought on a full unit of five offensive linemen, including two interior and three exterior prospects. Highlighting the group is Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 315), and Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280).

Greer and Riley, the No. 3 and No. 8 players in Ohio, respectively, are two recruits Greene believes could become cornerstones of the Buckeye offensive line with their dominating physical presence. He also believed that Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor three-star interior offensive lineman Tucker Smith (6-5, 280) could develop into a solid player.

"Sam Greer has a chance to really be special," Greene said. "The athletic ability at his size. I mean, the guy's 6-8, he's over 300 pounds, and he looks lean. He's got a chance to be a superstar. Then Max Riley is just a battler. He's an Austin Sierelveld type of guy — the (type of) guy that maybe you think should be an interior player, but then he ends up playing tackle, and he ends up being your best alignment. I think Tucker Smith has a chance to be really good. It's a good group."

While the 2026 line class is led by Greer and Riley, Day and offensive line coach Tyler Bowen also added three developmental prospects: Smith; Mentor, Ohio, three-star

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

offensive tackle Landry Brede (6-5, 280); and Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star interior offensive lineman Mason Wilhelm (6-4, 285).

Trieu noted that taking chances on the potential of offensive linemen is common, especially when the players show late growth or an upward trajectory.

"Ohio State has made it a point to not let those guys leave the state. So I think it's a really, really good group," Trieu said. "Landry Brede's senior year was significantly better than his junior season, so you're catching the guy on the rise. I think the same thing with Mason Wilhelm. Mason Wilhelm was good as a junior. He was even better as a senior. So I really like where this class stands."

On the other side of the line, Ohio State was particularly active in recruiting high-end talent on its defensive front. The defensive line class is headlined by the nation's No. 42 overall recruit, Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260), as well as three additional four-star prospects, Bessemer (Ala.) City defensive lineman Emanuel Ruffin (6-4, 295), Richland (N.J.) St. Augustine Prep defensive lineman Damari Simeon (6-3, 275) and Buford, Ga., defensive end Dre Quinn (6-4, 228).

Greene was impressed by Wilder, but he said he felt more drawn toward Ruffin among Ohio State's defensive line class, whom he compared to former Buckeye defensive tackle Tyleik Williams.

"I like Wilder a lot," Greene said. "He's

a California kid, and I like the competition he played against. He's quick, he's big. But I like Ruffin. He's got a chance to be Tyleik Williams. When I watch his film, that's who he looks like. He may need some work in the weight room and is a little pudgy. But that's how Tyleik was when he came into Ohio State. He didn't leave that way. So I think Ruffin's got the potential to be a freaking monster on the interior."

Greene added that while most of Ohio State's defensive line class was solid, he still had questions about Cleveland Glenville three-star defensive lineman Jamir Perez (6-4, 360) and Lafayette (La.) Acadiana three-star defensive lineman Darryus McKinley (6-3, 270).

Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek four-star linebacker Braxton Rembert (6-5, 200) could be in line for a position change at Ohio State. Some experts, including Greene, see him more as a defensive end, although he was primarily recruited by OSU linebackers coach James Laurinaitis.

Even if Rembert does eventually move away from the position, Ohio State still boasts two top-15 players at linebacker in Cleveland Glenville four-star Cincere Johnson (6-3, 222) and Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star CJ Sanna (6-3, 225).

Johnson, the state of Ohio's second-ranked prospect, the No. 50 recruit nationally and No. 3 at his position in the class, arrives as one of Ohio State's most physically ready signees. Trieu said Johnson's ability to move around in multiple positions on the field could allow him to

be a versatile option similar to some of the Buckeyes' current linebackers.

"The fact that Glenville used him in different positions – he's dropped into coverage, he blitzes, he's rushed off the edge some – I can see him at least pushing for some time because of his versatility," Trieu said. "Then down the line, when you look at what Ohio State did with Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese and the careers those guys had, it would not surprise me to see Cincere follow right along in the path."

In the secondary, Ohio State brings in a pair of cornerbacks, Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland four-star Jay Timmons (5-11, 185) and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185).

Greene said Timmons' late pledge, which came on Nov. 6 just a month before the early signing period, was a key addition for Ohio State, though he wasn't certain whether the cornerback would line up outside or in the slot with the Buckeyes.

"I've never seen him in person. So if he's 5-9, he's going to be a slot corner. If he's truly 5-11, that guy is good. I mean, his footwork is out of this world. He can flip his hips. So I like Timmons. Jordan Thomas is an athlete. He's tall and is a longer corner. He played a lot of wide receiver in high school, and I saw him as a wide receiver, but he'll translate to the other side of the ball."

In Ohio State's safety group, it's Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207), Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star Simeon Caldwell

(6-2, 195), Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star Khmari Bing (6-0, 190) and Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200), who flipped from Clemson on Dec. 3.

Ohio State fought tooth and nail with LSU to keep Bradford from staying home, and Trieu believes that he could become an impact player with the Buckeyes.

"Simeon is this kind of hybrid guy," Trieu said. "Kaden Gebhardt is a little bit of a hybrid guy who can do a lot of different things. Blaine's maybe a little bit more of your traditional safety, although some of the stuff that really impressed me with him is his blitzing and playing in the box. But you also see him playing really deep in the secondary. So it's easy to see why he was a top-150 guy when you can do all of those different things on the field."

Overall, Ohio State seemed to emphasize balance and depth in the 2026 class, pairing top-end talent with developmental prospects who fit the Buckeyes' long-term vision and analysts believe that approach could allow the group to outperform its ranking.

"Maybe it's because I'm a Midwest-based guy, but I've seen a lot of really good, high-end three-star guys come out of this region and be really good," Trieu said. "Ohio State is mixing the blend of taking five stars, but then also trusting your evaluations and taking some guys that maybe don't have as many offers or stars next to their name, but that the staff thinks are good players. So I appreciate that approach."



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Buckeyes Retain WR Henry In 2026 Class

In what was a long three-day early signing period when it came to the recruitment of Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), Ohio State was able to retain the wide receiver.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

He officially signed with the Buckeyes on Dec. 5, the last day of the early signing period, after there were some questions regarding whether he would remain in OSU's 2026 class.

On the first day of the early signing period, Dec. 3, offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was hired by South Florida to be the head coach, which prolonged the signing of multiple wide receiver recruits.

Minutes after the news came out that Hartline was leaving Ohio State, Henry's high school teammate Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180), a four-star wide receiver, flipped from the Buckeyes and signed with USC, and there was speculation that the position group would fully jump ship after the news.

It was reported by On3's Steve Wiltfong during the process that it seemed most likely that Henry would end up with Oregon, a team that had remained active in recruiting the five-star throughout his high school career, despite him being committed to Ohio State since July 28, 2023, which nearly paid off for head coach Dan Lanning.

But after some deliberation, Henry went on "The Pat McAfee Show" on ESPN to announce that he would remain with Ohio State.

Despite the fact that he's leaving for a new job, Hartline called Henry and told him that he "made the right choice" after he

went on ESPN. The video of Hartline's call was posted by Henry's family.

Henry's family also posted a video of the wide receiver talking with head coach Ryan Day before he let the world know what his plan was.

"I know it's been very stressful, and I know that there's been a lot coming at you," Day told Henry. "Just know, at the end of the day, this is a place that we're going to take care of you. You have my word on that. Is it going to be easy? No, it's not going to be easy. But we have a great culture, and you have the best situation in the country. You're going to be on the other side of Jeremiah (Smith) and you've got Julian (Sayin) throwing to you. You've got a winning culture and a bunch of people that care about you. Wait until you hear Buckeye Nation go wild when you announce this one."

Hartline's announced departure didn't impact the signing of Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) or Southlake (Texas) Carroll three-star Brock Boyd (6-1, 180), who both signed with the Buckeyes on Dec. 3.

But it seemed to weigh on Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-3, 190) as well. It took him an extra day to make his decision after the news came out, but Guilford also ended up sticking with Ohio State and signing on Dec. 4.

'26 SAF Gebhardt Flips

Ohio State might have lost multiple flips during the early signing period, Dixon-Wyatt included, but it was also able to pull one off of its own.

The Buckeyes announced the signing of Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200) on Dec. 3 after there had not been any rumblings that the former Clemson commit was still considering the Buckeyes.

OSU Football 2026 Commitments						
Player(s) in the class of 2026 who have signed letters of intent to play football at Ohio State.						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	
Favour Akih	RB	6-0	190	★★★★	Delaware (Ohio)	Rutherford B. Hayes
Khmari Bing	S	6-0	190	★★★	Baltimore St. Frances Academy	
Brock Boyd	WR	6-2	183	★★★	Southlake (Texas)	Carroll
Blaine Bradford	S	6-1	207	★★★★	Baton Rouge (La.)	Catholic
Landry Brede	OT	6-5	280	★★★	Mentor, Ohio	
Simeon Caldwell	S	6-3	185	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.)	The Bolles School
Luke Fahey	QB	6-0	185	★★★	Mission Viejo, Calif	
Kaden Gebhardt	S	6-2	200	★★★★	Lewis Center (Ohio)	Olentangy
Sam Greer	OT	6-7	310	★★★★	Akron Hoban	
Jerquaden Guilford	WR	6-3	190	★★★★	Fort Wayne (Ind.)	Northrop
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	205	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.)	Mater Dei
Cincere Johnson	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville	
Nick Lautar	TE	6-5	230	★★★	Lebanon, Ohio	
Darryus McKinley	DL	6-3	270	★★★	Lafayette (La.)	Acadiana
Jamir Perez	DL	6-4	360	★★★	Cleveland Glenville	
Dre Quinn	DL	6-4	228	★★★★	Buford, Ga	
Braxton Rembert	LB	6-5	200	★★★★	Hoschton (Ga.)	Mill Creek
Jaeden Ricketts	WR	6-0	187	★★★★	Pataskala (Ohio)	Watkins Memorial
Maxwell Riley	OT	6-5	280	★★★★	Avon Lake, Ohio	
Emanuel Ruffin	DL	6-4	295	★★★★	Bessemer (Ala.)	City
CJ Sanna	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Lewis Center (Ohio)	Olentangy
Damari Simeon	DL	6-3	275	★★★★	Richland (N.J.)	St. Augustine Prep
Tucker Smith	OL	6-5	280	★★★	Glendale (Ariz.)	Sandra Day O'Connor
Jordan Thomas	CB	6-1	185	★★★★	Oradell (N.J.)	Bergen Catholic
Jay Timmons	CB	5-11	185	★★★★	Gibsonia (Pa.)	Pine-Richland
Khary Wilder	DE	6-4	260	★★★★	Gardena (Calif.)	Junipero Serra
Mason Wilhelm	OL	6-4	285	★★★	Lakewood (Ohio)	St. Edward

Gebhardt committed to Clemson on March 11, 2025, after the Buckeyes had seemingly made him one of their priorities in Ohio, and although he took an official visit to Columbus in early June, it seemed as if the prospect of him signing with Ohio State was slim to none.

However, safeties coach Matt Guerrieri was able to pull off the flip at the 11th hour. Gebhardt is the No. 547 player in the country, the No. 44 safety and the No. 31 player in Ohio.

In four seasons at Olentangy, he had 418 tackles, 11 interceptions, 17 pass breakups, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery, earning All-OCC honors each of his four

seasons in high school.

He joined Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207), Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star Simeon Caldwell (6-2, 195) and Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star Khmari Bing (6-0, 190) in the 2026 safety group.

Bey Could Still Decide On OSU

When the early signing period rolled around, there were naturally some late flips both to and from the Buckeyes. But one that wasn't expected was North Forney, Texas, four-star athlete Legend Bey (5-11, 175) flipping from Ohio State back to Tennessee.

Bey had been committed to the Volunteers before flipping to the Buckeyes on Nov. 10, and it was expected that he would sign with OSU on Dec. 3. He showed up to his signing in Ohio State gear and took photos in front of a table decorated in Buckeye paraphernalia.

But on that day, Bey unexpectedly signed with the Volunteers, which many thought at the time might have been due to Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline leaving for the head coaching position at South Florida.

But there was reporting later that Bey's family got in the way when it came to signing with the Buckeyes.

There was a report from 247Sports' Mike Roach on Dec. 3 that Bey's mother was not willing to sign the paperwork needed for Bey to officially join Ohio State's class. His mother's signature was necessary since Bey had not yet turned 18.

Roach said that sources told him that Bey signing with Ohio State on that day was still most likely until the four-star met with his mother privately.

"Bey and his mother retreated to talk privately about the decision and work out the differences between the two programs,"



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OSU Football 2027 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2027 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.					
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	★★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.
Eli Johnson	S	6-3	200	★★★★	Cibolo (Texas) Steele
Brody McNeel	OT	6-5	285	★★★★	Richmond (Va.) Godwin
Angelo Smith	S	5-10	170	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
Mason Wilt	OT	6-5	265	★★★	St. Clairsville, Ohio
Kellen Wymer	OT	6-5	265	★★★★	Liberty Center, Ohio

OSU Football 2028 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2028 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.					
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Elijah Newman-Hall	RB	5-11	195	★★★★	Tampa (Fla.) Blake
Jameer Whyce	DL	6-4	270	★★★★★	Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison

Roach wrote. “There was an expectation that Bey would either convince her to sign off on Ohio State or take a break and push his decision another day.”

Roach wrote that during the meeting with his mother, Bey stopped responding to phone calls from coaches. Soon after, the North Forney coaching staff received a call from an Ohio State staffer that Bey had decided to sign with Tennessee.

The day after Bey signed with Tennessee and this news came out, he posted to Twitter.

“Good afternoon,” the post read. “I was just recently logged out of my (Instagram account) and probably will be logged out of (Twitter) as well by my older brother, who

has access to my account because I won’t sign to the school him and my mother want.”

Bey turns 18 in December, and if he still wants to go through with signing with the Buckeyes, he could request a release after submitting his paperwork to the Volunteers. If that is granted, he could join the Buckeyes after National Signing Day in February.

If he is not granted a release from Tennessee, he could enter the transfer portal when it opens in January. However, 247Sports’ source said that Tennessee would not be opposed to releasing him.

Sources also told 247Sports that Bey was unhappy with the decision to go to Tennessee and would seek a path to be released so that he could end up at Ohio State.

Day Happy With '26 Class

Day met with the media on Dec. 3 to talk about how the class was shaping up. The majority of the class had signed at that point, but there were still some holdouts.

But the head coach emphasized the importance of Ohio State’s approach to this recruiting cycle in waiting until the fall so that coaches could watch more senior film and get as much information for their evaluations of the prep players as they could.

“I felt like, from the beginning, what we needed to do was be really thorough in our evaluations, and make sure that they were the right fit for our program,” Day said. “The first thing we look at is certainly the ability, talent. Character, family, academics, mindset, there’s all of these things we take into consideration.”

Day didn’t speak for long, with general manager Mark Pantoni following him, but Day did specifically mention the trenches in the 2026 class and how he felt those positions finished.

“Up front is critical, and I think we’ve done a really good job there,” Day said. “(Defensive line coach Larry Johnson) really finished strong here, and we addressed some areas. (Offensive line coach Tyler Bowen) did an excellent job up front, and that was important.”

Ultimately, Ohio State signed a class of 27 players after Dixon-Wyatt and Bey flipped, but there could still be some additions with National Signing Day in February

still ahead. However, nearly all of the top prospects signed during the early signing period, and the transfer portal would be the most likely option to address any needs.

Twenty-seven signees is the most Day has had in a class since he began as the head coach at Ohio State, just surpassing the 26 he signed in 2020 and 2025, but the large number of prospects in the class was always a goal for Day and the Buckeyes, partly because of the way the game is changing.

“It’s only one portal window, and we need to know what our roster is by the time the portal closes,” Day said. “We have to plan accordingly and predict and forecast what it’s going to look like. We’re not going to have the spring portal to fill in these holes. It’s a challenge, but this is the number that we were looking for.”

Day Not Concerned About WR Drop-Off

Hartline is known as one of the best recruiters in the country when it comes to the wide receiver position. He landed five-star talent just about every year through the high-school ranks, and now that he is leaving for a new job, many expect that there could be a drop-off in how good the position is.

Being able to keep Guilford and Henry in the fold was a good sign for the Buckeyes, but Day didn’t seem to be very concerned about any fall without Hartline there to coach the wide receivers.

“Coach (Urban) Meyer and Coach (Jim)

Continued On Page 28

ASK AN ANALYST

With Allen Trieu of 247Sports

Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200) flipped from Clemson to Ohio State the first day of the early signing period. What do you make of him as a prospect, and what does he add to the 2026 safety group?

“First of all, he’s very physical. So he’s going to bring a lot of physicality. He’s kind of a classic Ohio kid. So you get that, and I think Ohio State’s been targeting that a lot more. If you look at the last couple of classes, who they offer in camp and who they clipped late in the cycle, they prioritize Ohio kids who kind of get it. But you look at his style of play, I think he’s one of the hardest hitters that I watched in the entire Midwest this year. Obviously, they talk about his physicality, but then you watch him run and cover. It’s not like it’s a guy who’s just in the box all the time. He can do a lot more things athletically than people give him credit for. So for Clemson to come up and take a kid from Ohio, they don’t have to do that, especially as a safety. There’s a lot of those guys running around in the South. (247Sports) has him as a four-star. We’ve had him as a four-star for a long time, and we felt very convinced about that, even from early in his junior year.”

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180) flipped to USC, but the Buckeyes were able to keep Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) in the fold. What do you make of the wide receiver group in the 2026 class?

“I think Chris Henry Jr. was arguably one of the biggest wins of any cycle, any school, in the entire cycle, just because of how important he is, his talent, and how contentious it got at the end. But I think the wide receiver room is still going to be really, really good. I don’t know all of what went into Kayden’s decision, but I assume the strength of the receiver classes was a piece of it. Maybe he was looking for a place where he could be the go-to guy, and I think you have a true alpha in Chris Henry. Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-2, 190) is probably one of the more under-talked

about recruits in the country and in this class. He’s almost a top-150 guy who had a really good senior year, who just doesn’t draw some of the press clippings the other guys do.

“Then, I think about the other guys. Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) had a good senior year, and West Virginia tried to flip him. But I think you have two legitimate star receivers and then really good complementary pieces. I think Southlake (Texas) Caroll three-star wide receiver Brock Boyd (6-1, 180) is going to be a guy who outplays his ranking. He’s a guy where you kind of throw the stars out the window when you look at him. I think when you have a Chris Henry and a Jerquaden Guilford, to have a guy like Brock Boyd as a complementary piece of that, I think, is perfect.”

With the early signing period behind us, what position group do you view as the most important to address either in the transfer portal or the high school ranks before National Signing Day?

“I think that first of all, in their class, they ended up kind of having a very, what I would say is a balanced class. They have talent coming in at, really, every position group, so I don’t think they left many holes in the recruiting class. As far as the transfer portal, I always think that schools are going to look on both lines of scrimmage, and I think that’s going to be a place Ohio State looks at. Then you look at the secondary, with some of the losses that could happen back there. So lines of scrimmage and then secondary would be a couple of positions that I would look to expect Ohio State to address in the portal.”

With the focus turning to the 2027 class, what do you see as the most important position or players to go after in that class?

“I think when you’re at a place like Ohio State, you reach a point where you don’t go into recruiting classes anymore and say, ‘We have these needs to fill.’ You’re always just getting the best. So I don’t see a position group where I’m like, ‘They have to maybe hit here or there,’ because they’ve done so well at

kind of building the roster each year. If I had to pick one that I would say maybe there’s a little bit of importance to it, maybe a position like running back. You got one in the last class with Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), and they took a swing at a couple of second running back options that didn’t work out. So running back, that may be a place that there’s some top-end guys on the board, like McKeesport, Pa., five-star running back Kemon Spell (5-9, 205), and Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205), who they’re taking a close look at.

“That’s one place where you would love to be able to get a high-end, national type guy. So I think those recruitments will be important. They’re right there for a couple of top receivers, which they always are. They can land Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195) or Harper Woods, Mich., four-star wide receiver Dakota Guerrant (6-1, 185), and that would continue their success there. But I think the nice part about recruiting at Ohio State is you don’t have to zero in, like ‘We have to get somebody at this position or we’re in trouble.’ They can just kind of attack the top of the board.”

With Sherrone Moore being fired soon after the early signing period, do you believe any Wolverine signees will leave Michigan’s 2026 class?

“Billings (Mont.) West four-star tight end Matt Ludwig (6-4, 240) already got his release (Dec. 11). There might be more, but I think it all depends on what happens next. I think it depends on who the next coach is, but I think anytime there’s change, there’s always the possibility of guys leaving the class. We saw it happen at Penn State, and now guys are leaving the Iowa State class as a result to probably go to Penn State. I don’t think it’s going to be quite that drastic at Michigan. I don’t think there will be as many kids leaving, but (Ludwig) might not be the last one. I don’t foresee a ton of guys leaving that class, though.”

Continued From Page 27

Tressel said this to me when I took the job: This job is bigger than any one person,” Day said. “Ohio State has been good for a long time and will continue to be good moving forward. This program is strong and will continue to be strong.”

Pantoni noted that Day likely had many missed phone calls from receivers coaches wanting to interview for Hartline’s position, insinuating that Day will have a plethora of great options to choose from.

But keeping Henry and Guilford in the class was the product of Hartline not being the only person whom those players had a relationship with, at least according to what Day said on the first day of the early signing period.

“I think it’s important for recruits to know that, when an assistant coach leaves, you still have somebody who’s running the defense. You still have a head coach who’s running the program,” Day said. “That’s very important along the way. It’s group recruiting. Something we really sell is our stability. It’s great when recruits get to spend time with (coaches other than their position coach) to recognize that it’s more than just a relationship with a single person.”

Day Talks Offensive Line Recruiting

After former offensive line coach Justin

Frye left in February for the same position with the Arizona Cardinals, Day turned to Bowen to lead the way at that position. One of the big reasons he believed Bowen was the man for the job was because of his history in recruiting.

Now that Bowen has been with the Buckeyes for nearly a full recruiting cycle and signed a class of his own, Day spoke on how he felt the offensive line coach did with the Buckeyes.

“Thorough,” said Day of what he thought about Bowen’s first year recruiting at Ohio State. “He’s constantly bringing guys in on campus. When we have a game or a visit, there’s eight, nine, 10 offensive linemen, and they’re big dudes when they walk in. He’s got a deep list and he connects well.

“For an offensive line coach, it’s a great combination of the ability to coach technique and he’s got toughness, but he also does an unbelievable job of connecting. He sees things from a wider lens. He’s got a lot of talent, and the guys in that room really believe in what he’s doing. You can see the connection with the recruits coming in. He’s off to a great start.”

The top recruit Bowen landed was Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 315), the fourth-highest rated player in OSU’s class according to 247Sports composite rankings, who shot up in the rankings after he committed to the Buckeyes.

He is the No. 51 player in the country, the No. 6 offensive tackle and the No. 3 player in Ohio.

Greer committed to Ohio State shortly after Bowen began with the Buckeyes. Frye had built the original relationship with Greer, but Bowen was able to finish the job and get him to join the ranks. Bowen also landed commitments from Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280); Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star interior offensive lineman Mason Wilhelm (6-4, 285); Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O’Connor three-star interior offensive lineman Tucker Smith (6-5, 280); and Mentor, Ohio, three-star offensive tackle Landry Brede (6-5, 280). Brede and Wilhelm were both late flips.

But as Greer goes, the Buckeyes are very high on the player he could develop into, which Pantoni was clear about.

“Coach Day offered him as a freshman, and that was his first offer, so that obviously helped,” Pantoni said. “Sam – tackles like him don’t grow on trees. We don’t take Ohio kids for granted, especially anymore with NIL involved. We wanted to show he’s a high priority for us. We think he’s a future left tackle here.”

Three OSU Commits Win State Titles

After signing with Ohio State, three

Buckeye prospects won state championships in Ohio.

Cleveland Glenville teammates four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 222) and three-star defensive lineman Jamir Perez (6-4, 360) won the Division IV state championship 45-7 over Shelby. The Tarblooders finished the game with five sacks.

The Glenville defense allowed just 27 yards in the game, which was a record for fewest yards allowed in an OHSAA championship game, regardless of division. The old mark was 30 yards, set in 1980 by Tiffin Calvert, which beat Newark Catholic that year.

“We always said, take them to somewhere they’ve never been before,” Johnson told cleveland.com. “That’s a great team, but they haven’t faced a Glenville defense with the speed, size and somebody in the middle like myself.”

Liberty Center, Ohio, four-star interior offensive lineman Kellen Wymer (6-5, 265) won a state championship in Ohio as well. He is currently committed to Ohio State’s 2027 class.

Liberty Center beat Wheelersburg 35-3 to win the Division V state title with Wymer on the line. He plays defense as well for his high school team and recorded a sack in the state championship game.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1990

Ohio State recruiting coordinator Steve Pederson frankly didn’t know what the big deal was all about.

In the span of a week, the Buckeyes lost the services of coaching staff members Jim Colletto and Bobby Turner to Purdue and Gary Blackney to Bowling Green, and they awaited word on Bill Young’s future while he interviewed for the head coaching job at North Texas State.

While many of the so-called recruiting experts were saying it marked the beginning of a troublesome time for the Buckeyes in the recruiting wars, Pederson disagreed.

“Obviously your preference is to keep the staff intact,” said the third-year recruiting coordinator. “But you can’t always do that. When your assistant coaches get good jobs, I think that’s a compliment to your program.

“I think it’s good for the kids to look at the situation. I don’t believe you should choose a college because of a certain assistant coach. Choosing a school for one coach isn’t a good plan.

“Our philosophy as far as recruiting is the same as it always has been. We’ll recruit as hard as ever.”

30 Years Ago — 1995

Earlier in the year, analysts wondered how big an impact it was for Ohio State to have won nationally televised games over Boston College, Notre Dame and Penn State on its way to an 11-1 mark.

Now, however, the speculation centered on just how big a recruiting bump a school could get from the Heisman Trophy in the wake of senior tailback Eddie George’s landslide win.

“I think it’s huge,” said Bobby Burton of The National Recruiting Advisor. “Anything that gives a program exposure, not just on a regional level, but on a national level, helps.

“It especially helps when you are recruiting so many national-caliber kids like they have been recruiting this year,” he said.

Ohio State welcomed a group of about two dozen players to campus for official visits over “Heisman Weekend,” on Dec. 8-9, and the school capitalized on the moment by having all of its players/hosts take their respective prospects to the Saturday’s sports pub in Powell, Ohio, to watch the announcement on big screen TVs among cheering OSU fans.

25 Years Ago — 2000

Heading into the holiday “dead period,” Ohio State’s football recruiting campaign for 2001 appeared to be in full gear.

The Buckeyes had recently received two more verbal commitments from San Diego Mission Bay running back JaJa Riley and Fort Scott (Kan.) Community College wide receiver Chris Vance, lifting their total in the class to 13 verbals.

Plus they seemed to be in good shape with a pair of prospects from Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy: lineman Alphonso Townsend and tight end Eric Coleman.

Ohio State also moved to shore up its depth problems on the offensive line by inviting Steve Winner from nearby Dublin Coffman to join the team in the fall as a preferred walk-on.

20 Years Ago — 2005

A trio of Tarblooders all made their way down to Columbus for the first weekend of December on an official visit, just as Cleveland Glenville players such as Troy Smith, Ted Ginn Jr., Jamario O’Neal, Curtis Terry and Donte Whitner had done before them.

None of offensive lineman Bryant Browning, defensive lineman Robert Rose or wide receiver/defensive back Ray Small issued a verbal commitment during their visit, but following the weekend there were strong indications that all three would continue the Glenville pipeline to Ohio State.

“It was great,” Small told BSB of the visit. “It was a great experience. I liked the academic programs, and it gave me an opportunity to meet all the coaches.”

Added Rose, “I just felt comfortable there. I’m from Cleveland, so I knew everything about Ohio State football already. I just liked it a lot.”

15 Years Ago — 2010

Although official visit season was in full swing as Ohio State worked to complete its 2011 recruiting class, the Buckeyes continued to move forward with their 2012 class as well.

Three days into December, head coach Jim Tressel found himself accepting his fifth verbal commitment from a familiar family. Three-star offensive guard Jacoby Boren out of Pickerington (Ohio) Central confirmed what was viewed as a foregone conclusion and issued his commitment to the Buckeyes.

Boren was the youngest of three sons in the family. Oldest brother Justin was OSU’s senior starting left guard at the time while middle son Zach was a sophomore and the team’s starter at fullback.

Through his brothers, the youngest Boren already had a comfort level with the program that made it too difficult to pass up.

“I went over to see Coach Tressel at Ohio State because I wanted to tell him in person,” Boren told BSB. “My family went with me, which was pretty cool. I had known for a while that I was going to commit, so we went over there and had a pretty long meeting with Coach Tressel. Once we all sat down, I just told him I wanted to be a Buckeye.”

10 Years Ago — 2015

The hiring of former Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano to replace co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash was expected to keep the Silver Bullets playing at a high level, but it also gave Ohio State a proven recruiter in areas that the Buckeyes valued.

When Schiano arrived at Rutgers in 2001 following a two-year stint as the defensive coordinator at Miami (Fla.), the Scarlet Knights were a mess. The first few recruiting classes he signed

never averaged higher than 2.25 stars per prospect. He left for the NFL just as the 2012 recruiting cycle was coming to an end, and that class averaged 3.05 stars per prospect and finished 31st nationally, a massive improvement over the days when the Scarlet Knights routinely finished 60th or worse.

“For people who don’t remember what Rutgers was like before he got there, they really have no idea how good of a recruiter he was when he was there,” said Scout.com recruiting analyst Brian Dohn, who was based out of New Jersey. “It’s such a difficult place to recruit at. When he took over, there were maybe one or two NFL-caliber players on the roster, and by the time he left, there were five or six guys getting drafted each year.”

Five Years Ago — 2020

Ohio State’s nearly two-year-long recruitment of Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka finally paid off when he announced his commitment to the Buckeyes on Dec. 11.

He was considered the top-rated wide receiver and No. 9 prospect overall in the class of 2021 after catching 199 passes for 3,907 yards and 61 touchdowns in three seasons at the varsity level. He had also rushed for four touchdowns and returned five punts, three interceptions and one kickoff for a score and hoped to add to that total when the state of Washington began its postponed fall season in the spring.

Egbuka landed an offer from Ohio State in January 2019, and he made his first trip to campus for a spring practice in March, which coincided with the program’s annual Student Appreciation Day. He then returned for an unofficial visit for the Buckeyes’ 38-7 win over Wisconsin in October.

One Year Ago — 2024

There was some expected movement during the early signing period from Dec. 4-6, with Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na’eem Offord flipping his commitment to Oregon on Dec. 4 as the Buckeyes were signing 26 other recruits, pulling off two flips of their own.

Offord leaving OSU’s 2025 class was not unexpected. He had been frequenting games on other teams’ campuses the entire season, although Auburn seemed the more likely destination since he had been to mostly Tigers games that season. He did take a visit to Eugene, Ore., for the Ducks’ 32-31 win over Ohio State on Oct. 12 and stayed in contact with coach Dan Lanning and the Ducks throughout the two months after that game, ultimately deciding he wanted to be with the 2024 Big Ten champions.

But signing day wasn’t all bad news for the Buckeyes, with Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers signing after he had decommitted from Alabama on Nov. 17. OSU also added Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star edge rusher Epi Sitanilei, who had been committed to UCLA since June 30.

Kennedy Cambridge Records 100th Steal

Ohio State guard Kennedy Cambridge hit a career milestone since BSB last went to press. In Ohio State's 79-70 win over Northwestern on Dec. 7, Cambridge came up with her 100th career steal. She entered the game with 97 career steals and ended the game with a game-high total of four steals.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

"Kennedy is very important to what we do," said head coach Kevin McGuff. "She plays extremely hard, and she has a great grasp of our defensive system. She's really able to thrive with that, and she also has excellent instincts, and so we really rely on her for a lot on that end."

Cambridge has been an elite defensive player ever since she started her collegiate career at Kentucky. Despite earning limited playing time for the Wildcats, Cambridge had 21 steals in 19 games.

After transferring to Ohio State and redshirting during the 2023-24 season, Cambridge was a spark plug off the bench last year, routinely making the Buckeyes' full-court press better when she was on the court. She finished the season with 48 steals, the third most on the team. She has been even better defensively this year and leads the Buckeyes with 46 steals through 10 games.

OSU Breaks Records In Historic Win

On Nov. 30, Ohio State had an historic 130-32 win over Niagara. During the win, the program broke multiple single-game team records. The 98-point win was easily the largest in program history, and the Buckeyes also set single-game records in points (130), assists (37) and field goals made (52).

Although Ohio State certainly played well in the win and shot 61.2 percent from the field as a team, the opponent was also partially responsible for such a lopsided result. Not only has Niagara lost each of its nine games so far this season, but it has failed to be competitive in any of its games. The Purple Eagles have lost each game they've played in by at least 15 points.

The game was well out of hand by halftime, when Ohio State held a 57-12 lead, but the Buckeyes set their respective program records because the younger players arguably played even better in the second half than the starters did in the first half.

McGuff liked how his team continued to play with urgency regardless of the score.

"Sometimes it's hard because as a coach, you always want them to play to our standards, regardless of the score, which is sometimes easier said than done," McGuff said after the game. "It's easy to lose a lot of focus when you get a lead like that. But I think our kids handled the game the right way, and even though the lead kind of ballooned, we kept playing the right way and how we want to play, and we kept focusing on getting better."

Watson Shines Off The Bench

Ohio State had several players step up off the bench, with multiple games against mid-major teams being fairly lopsided. Perhaps no player has done a better job with opportunities off the bench than sophomore guard Ava Watson. After impressively filling in for sophomore guard Jalonni Cambridge during Ohio State's 83-81 win over West Virginia on Nov. 26, when Cambridge fouled out of the game, Watson followed that performance up with a huge outing against Niagara. In the win, Watson had season-high totals of 15 points, 10 assists and seven steals.

"I think she's playing really well right now," McGuff said after the game. "She did a great job in the Bahamas and was really instrumental in the win against West Virginia. When Jalonni fouled out, she did a great job with the ball in her hands, making sure it got to the right people at the right time and running the offense without turning the ball over. Then today, I thought she was really good as well, so I think she's coming along. We know how talented she is, and I think as she gets more comfortable this season, she's going to continue to flourish for us."

After the win over Niagara, Watson agreed that she was improving her play. Although the 5-8 guard is best known for her three-point shooting ability, she said she has aimed to help her team with her defense.

"I am trying to work on my defense," Watson said. "I think that's where I can benefit my team the most, and then today I just had to facilitate, because obviously Jalonni wasn't the point out there, so I'm just getting my teammates open, running pace and (playing defense with energy)."

Watson has had a slightly different role this year than the one she occupied last year for the Buckeyes. With Cambridge being Ohio State's only primary ball-handler, Watson has had to step up as a point guard when Cambridge is out of the game. So far through 10 games, the move has worked well for Watson. She is averaging 2.4 assists per game, the fourth-most on the team.

"It's different," Watson said of her role. "Last year, I was just a shooter in the corner, and Jalonni would look for me. This year, it's changed be-

cause we really only have one point guard, so I knew I had to fill that role. It's good. I like it. I know I have to do it for my team, so whatever is best for my team."

During an availability on Dec. 5, McGuff talked about how important Watson's improvement has been and pointed out how her performances have taken some pressure off Cambridge.

"She's a very talented player, and she's shown she can play with the ball in her hands and be the point guard," McGuff said. "It gives us a little more confidence to take Jalonni out, regardless of how she's playing, just to give her a little bit of rest. We rely on Jalonni for so much, but we want to give her a chance to be her best, and sometimes that's going to be with a little bit of rest. We have more confidence than ever that we have somebody who can handle her duties when she's out with the way Ava's playing."

"Ava's also good off the ball. I think this year, so far, she's shown she can be a point guard. I don't think she's shown her abilities yet, how good she can be off the ball. I think she can really score the ball, and she hasn't hit her stride with that to the level I think she can. I think you'll see her hit her stride there too, and you'll see a really good combo guard who can impact us at either position."

Watson's improvement as a backup point guard doesn't mean she's not scoring. She has averaged 7.6 points per game so far this season, despite shooting just 7 of 26 from three-point range (26.9 percent).

Buckeyes Make First Appearance In Top 25

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State

made its first appearances in the Associated Press' top-25 poll. After taking down West Virginia, Belmont and Niagara in a span of less than a week, Ohio State was ranked at No. 23 in the rankings released on Dec. 1.

Then, after the win over Northwestern, the Buckeyes moved up two spots in the poll released a week later. The Buckeyes were one of nine Big Ten teams to be ranked inside the top 25 – No. 4 UCLA, No. 6 Michigan, No. 7 Maryland, No. 11 Iowa, No. 16 USC, No. 20 Washington, No. 24 Nebraska and No. 25 Michigan State.

The nine teams the Big Ten had ranked in the top 25 tied a record for the most teams from one conference included in the poll, set early last year. Then, in the Week 7 edition of the poll, Ohio State was ranked No. 21 after wins over Northern Kentucky and Toledo. The Big Ten had nine teams ranked in the top 25.

Cambridge Is Plank's Lady Buck For November

Sophomore point guard Jalonni Cambridge is Plank's Lady Buck for November, after she got out to a tremendous start to the 2025-26 season. In seven games, Cambridge averaged a team-high 19.9 points per game, grabbed 5.7 rebounds and dished out 3.3 assists per game. Cambridge was also shooting an efficient 51.9 percent from the field and was making an impact on the defensive end by averaging 2.0 steals per game.

Cambridge's impressive start helped lift Ohio State to a solid 6-1 record over the first few weeks of the season.

Plank's Cafe



Jalonni Cambridge
Sophomore Guard
Nashville, Tenn.

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OSU Wins Four Straight, Including B1G Opener

By **BOBBY GORBETT**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State won all four of its games to extend its winning streak to seven. The Buckeyes started their stretch by defeating Niagara by the largest margin in program history before picking up a win over Northwestern in their Big Ten opener.

Ohio State then played two more games against mid-major opponents, dominating both Northern Kentucky and Toledo after slow starts in each game.

OSU Beats Niagara By Historic Margin

Ohio State (6-1) extended its winning streak to four games on Nov. 30 in emphatic fashion. The Buckeyes' 130-32 win over Niagara (0-7) was their largest victory margin in program history. The previous record was 70 points, when OSU beat Akron 105-35 in 1977 and topped Ohio 107-37 in 2004. Ohio State also scored the most points in a single game in program history in the win. The 130 points scored bested the previous program high set during a 119-63 win over Idaho State in 1994.

Ohio State was incredibly efficient on both ends in its historic victory. The Buckeye shot 52 of 85 from the field (61.2 percent) and held the Purple Eagles to just 10-of-63 shooting (15.9 percent).

After the game, Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said he liked the way his team's effort remained high despite its lead being large from early on in the game.

"Obviously, it was fairly lopsided quickly, but I thought that we handled it pretty well from the standpoint that we continued to play hard," McGuff said. "A lot of times your effort kind of wanes, and then we also shared the ball on offense and kept making the extra pass until we got the shot that we wanted."

The Buckeyes wasted no time in creating a huge lead in their win, holding Niagara without a field goal for nearly seven minutes to start the game. In the meantime, Ohio State didn't shoot very well on the other end. The Buckeyes made only one of their first six shots and six of their first 15 field goals, but because the defense was so strong to start the game, they had an 18-1 lead with 3:24 remaining in the first quarter. Niagara's first field goal came when senior guard Talia Dial made a layup at the 3:09 mark, but Ohio State closed the opening quarter on an 8-3 scoring run for a 26-6 lead.

The Buckeyes' defensive dominance continued in the second quarter. They held the Eagles without a point for nearly five minutes to open the frame, and sophomore point guard Jalonni Cambridge and freshman guard Dasha Biriuk combined for nine points during a 14-0 run that made the score 40-6.

Niagara guard Caliana Fenceroy helped get her team on the board in the second quarter with four points in a span of less than 40 seconds, but Ohio State responded, scoring the next 14 points, capped by a Biriuk jumper, before going into halftime with a 57-12 halftime lead. The 45-point advantage the Buckeyes had at halftime was their largest halftime lead in program history. Biriuk had 10 points at the break, topped only by Cam-

bridge's 12 and Bryn Martin's 11.

The Buckeyes didn't relax after halftime. Instead, they opened the third quarter on an 18-2 scoring run that made the score 75-14.

After Dial ended yet another Niagara scoring drought, Ohio State stretched its lead past 70 points when Biriuk drained two straight three-pointers during the middle of the third quarter to make it 87-16.

Sophomore guard Ava Watson helped Ohio State extend its lead to 81 with a two-point jumper that came with 30 seconds left in the third quarter, making it 99-18.

Despite resting their starters for the entire final frame, the Buckeyes had no issues in the fourth quarter, outscoring Niagara 31-11 in the final 10 minutes.

Biriuk and fellow freshman guard Martin were Ohio State's two leading scorers in the win. Biriuk had a game-high 25 points, while Martin followed with 21 points. Watson, who scored 15 points in the game, led Ohio State with 10 assists and seven steals. Cambridge also reached double figures (14 points). Redshirt-freshman forward Seini Henry had a team-high 10 rebounds, helping Ohio State rebound Niagara 54-37, and tallied six points.

Niagara was led by Dial and Fenceroy in the loss, who each had nine points. Tyasia Freeman had 11 rebounds.

OSU Defeats Northwestern In Conference Opener

Ohio State (7-1, 1-0) opened conference play with a 79-70 win over Northwestern (6-3, 0-1 Big Ten) on Dec. 7 in front of 1,515 fans at Welsh-Ryan Arena in Evanston, Ill. The Buckeyes received standout performances from Cambridge and redshirt-freshman forward Kylee Kitts, who combined for 40 of Ohio State's points.

Both teams struggled offensively early on, with the Buckeyes and Wildcats failing to score in the first two minutes. It wasn't until Northwestern forward Grace Sullivan made a jumper at the 7:38 mark that either team finally scored. Ohio State guard T'yana Todd tied the game at two with a second-chance layup, and neither team created a lead larger than two points until Northwestern closed the first quarter on a 6-0 scoring run to go up 16-10. During that run, the Buckeyes missed their final five field-goal attempts of the frame.

Sophomore center Elsa Lemmilä helped Ohio State cut the deficit to 20-18 with a layup at the 6:27 mark of the second quarter, but Northwestern answered with a three-point jumper by Xamiya Walton on the other end. Trailing by five with 6:05 remaining in the second quarter, Ohio State turned the game around with a 15-2 scoring run that ended the first half at 33-25 for the Buckeyes.

Watson scored four points during the run. Three of those points were from a jumper she made from beyond the arc with 1:26 remaining in the first half. Todd made her own three-point jumper during that run with 59 seconds left, and Lemmilä gave Ohio State a



Dasha Biriuk

Ohio State 130, Niagara 32							
Nov. 30, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Niagara (0-7)	6	6	9	11	32		
Ohio State (6-1)	26	31	42	31	130		
Niagara	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Freeman	24	1-5	5-6	6-5	0	3	7
Dial	33	3-15	2-2	1-0	2	1	9
Rutledge	25	2-5	0-0	4-3	0	3	4
Wilson	8	1-3	1-2	0-1	0	2	3
Fenceroy	23	3-10	2-2	0-2	0	4	9
Rumph	23	0-9	0-0	0-3	2	1	0
Williams	17	0-3	0-0	1-1	1	3	0
Bila	23	0-4	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Veljovic	7	0-3	0-0	1-0	0	5	0
Campbell	17	0-6	0-0	3-0	1	2	0
Totals	200	10-63	10-12	20-17	6	24	32
Percentages: FG: 15.9%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 2-17. (Dial 1-9, Fenceroy 1-4, Rumph 0-2, Bila 0-2). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 1 (Rutledge). Turnovers: 43 (Rumph 15, Wilson 5, Freeman 4, Dial 4, Fenceroy 4, Williams 3, Bila 3, Rutledge 2, Campbell 2, Team). Steals: 6 (Dial, Rutledge, Fenceroy, Rumph, Bila, Veljovic).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	13	4-6	1-4	5-0	4	0	9
Gray	14	3-6	0-0	1-4	4	0	6
K. Cambridge	14	4-5	1-1	0-2	3	3	9
Todd	12	3-8	0-0	2-1	0	1	7
J. Cambridge	15	6-8	2-2	1-4	6	2	14
Watson	27	7-10	1-2	2-2	10	3	15
Martin	28	8-11	2-2	0-3	5	2	21
Lemmilä	11	3-3	3-4	0-3	1	1	9
Biriuk	26	8-11	4-5	0-4	1	1	25
Hobbs	16	4-7	0-0	3-2	0	2	9
Henry	24	2-9	2-4	3-7	3	0	6
Totals	200	52-85	16-24	20-34	37	15	130
Percentages: FG: 61.2%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 10-24 (Biriuk 5-6, Lemmilä 3-4, Henry 0-4, Todd 1-3, Hobbs 1-2, Gray 0-2, K. Cambridge 0-1, J. Cambridge 0-1, Watson 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 11 (Kitts 4, K. Cambridge 2, Watson, Lemmilä, Biriuk, Hobbs, Henry). Turnovers: 18 (J. Cambridge 6, Hobbs 3, Watson 2, Martin 2, Kitts, K. Cambridge, Todd, Henry, Team). Steals: 23 (Watson 7, K. Cambridge 5, Martin 3, J. Cambridge 2, Biriuk 2, Gray, Todd, Lemmilä, Henry). Officials: Mark Berger, Natosha Harris, Kevin Pethel. Attendance: 5,239							

33-25 lead heading into the locker room with a second-chance bucket.

Ohio State scored the first basket of the second half on a jumper by Kitts, but Northwestern hit two straight three-pointers to make the score 35-31. Northwestern's momentum didn't last long, though. Ohio State went on an 18-4 scoring run to extend its lead to 18 points, 53-35, at 4:24 of the third. Kitts led the Buckeyes during the run with seven points.

Northwestern cut Ohio State's lead to 14, 61-47, entering the final frame.

Kitts continued to play well in the fourth quarter, scoring Ohio State's first seven points to help put the Buckeyes up 68-51.

Northwestern kept fighting and gave itself somewhat of a chance with a 6-0 scoring run that made the score 74-63 with 3:30 remaining in the game. However, Todd drained a three-point jumper at the 3:12 mark that helped Ohio State cruise to its nine-point win.

After the game, McGuff was disappointed with the way his team played defensively in the win but acknowledged the Buckeyes played well enough on the other end to come away with the win. Northwestern shot 53.1 percent (17 of 32) in the second half.

"I don't think our defense was good at all today at any point," McGuff said, "Offen-

Ohio State 79, Northwestern 70							
Dec. 7, 2025							
Welsh-Ryan Arena • Evanston, Ill.							
		1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (7-1, 1-0)	10	23	28	18		79	
Northwestern (6-3, 0-1)	16	9	22	23		70	
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	19	6-10	6-6	3-1	2	3	18
Gray	33	3-10	3-4	0-5	3	2	9
K. Cambridge	36	1-5	2-2	1-4	6	1	4
Todd	28	4-9	2-2	0-0	1	2	13
J. Cambridge	25	10-19	2-2	1-3	3	5	22
Martin	12	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Lemmilä	20	3-9	1-2	6-3	1	1	7
Watson	22	1-2	3-4	0-2	0	1	6
Biriuk	3	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Hobbs	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Henry	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-68	19-22	13-24	16	15	79
Percentages: FG: 41.2%. FT: 86.4%. Three-point field goals: 4-18. (Todd 3-6, K. Cambridge 0-3, J. Cambridge 0-3, Gray 0-2, Martin 0-2, Watson 1-1, Biriuk 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 6 (K. Cambridge 2, Martin 2, Todd, Lemmilä). Turnovers: 13 (Kitts 5, Gray 3, K. Cambridge, Todd, J. Cambridge, Martin, Biriuk). Steals: 11 (K. Cambridge 4, Todd 2, J. Cambridge 2, Watson 2, Gray).							
Northwestern	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Sullivan	37	17-28	3-3	2-6	2	4	37
Thomas	12	1-4	0-0	1-2	1	3	2
Lash	28	2-5	0-0	0-3	5	4	4
Lau	32	2-7	0-0	1-6	14	4	6
Harter	33	3-9	2-2	2-2	1	2	11
Walton	31	4-10	0-0	0-2	1	1	10
Turner	10	0-1	0-0	4-2	0	0	0
Hodgens	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Wang	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Keswick	7	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
López	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	29-67	5-5	13-25	24	21	70
Percentages: FG: 43.3%. FT: 100%. Three-point field goals: 7-18 (Harter 3-6, Walton 2-5, Lau 2-4, Sullivan 0-1, Lash 0-1, Keswick 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Sullivan, Thomas, Lau, Turner). Turnovers: 19 (Harter 5, Lau 4, Sullivan 2, Thomas 2, Lash 2, Walton, Wang, Keswick, Team). Steals: 5 (Sullivan 3, Lash, Lau).							
Officials: Natasha Camy, Tiara Cruse, Tim Daley. Attendance: 1,515							

sively in the first half, we settled for a lot of quick, contested shots, but in the second half, I thought we executed much better, and we got a lot of great shots. I think ultimately that allowed us to pull away."

Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer in the win with 22 points on 10-of-19 shooting, while Kitts wasn't far behind with 18 points on 6-of-10 shooting. Todd was the only other Buckeye to reach double figures with 13 points. Junior guard Kennedy Cambridge led Ohio State with six assists, while Lemmilä grabbed a game-high nine rebounds.

Ohio State shot 28 of 68 from the field (41.2 percent) and held Northwestern to 29-of-67 shooting (43.3 percent).

Sullivan was outstanding for the Wildcats. She had a game-high 37 points on 17-of-28 shooting and led her team with eight rebounds.

OSU Sets Another Record In NKU Win

Led by Jalonni Cambridge, who scored a game-high 33 points, Ohio State (8-1) bounced back from a poor first half to defeat Northern Kentucky (3-9) 94-62 on Dec. 11. Overall, the Buckeyes didn't have a great

Ohio State 94, Northern Ky. 62							
Dec. 11, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus							
		1	2	3	4	F	
Northern Ky. (3-9)		22	21	9	10	62	
Ohio State (8-1)		20	18	30	26	94	
Northern Ky.	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts
Jordan	19	2-5	0-0	2-5	1	2	4
Moody	14	3-5	0-0	1-4	1	3	6
Rushton	28	3-9	0-0	1-5	2	3	8
Bystry	26	7-8	6-8	0-3	4	2	21
Hubert	20	2-5	0-0	0-0	0	0	6
Meredith	10	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Wolterman	16	2-3	0-2	2-1	0	1	4
Hunt	15	1-4	1-2	0-0	1	2	4
Hamilton	11	1-3	2-4	0-4	1	4	5
Morgan	19	0-4	2-2	0-2	1	2	2
Thomas	12	0-1	0-0	0-3	0	1	0
Rashelbach	4	1-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	2
Eaglin	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Razzano	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	22-49	11-18	10-30	11	23	62
Percentages: FG: 44.9%. FT: 61.1%. Three-point field goals: 7-23. (Rushton 2-6, Hubert 2-5, Hunt 1-3, Jordan 0-3, Hamilton 1-2, Morgan 0-2, Bystry 1-1, Eaglin 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Morgan, Thomas). Turnovers: 37 (Jordan 8, Rushton 8, Moody 4, Bystry 4, Hubert 3, Hunt 2, Morgan 2, Team 2, Meredith, Hamilton, Thomas, Rashelbach). Steals: 4 (Jordan, Bystry, Meredith, Hamilton).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	19	4-8	2-2	2-3	1	4	11
Gray	24	2-10	3-4	0-2	3	1	7
K. Cambridge	27	2-6	2-2	3-1	5	2	6
Todd	23	4-6	0-0	0-1	0	4	9
J. Cambridge	28	12-21	9-9	1-5	2	1	33
Watson	26	3-8	6-6	1-0	2	1	13
Lemmilä	17	2-3	2-4	2-3	3	2	6
Martin	18	2-5	0-0	1-1	0	2	4
Biriuk	8	0-3	0-0	1-1	0	3	0
Henry	6	1-4	0-0	2-1	0	2	2
Hobbs	4	1-2	0-0	0-1	1	0	3
Totals	200	33-76	24-27	14-20	17	22	94
Percentages: FG: 43.4%. FT: 88.9%. Three-point field goals: 4-23 (Watson 1-5, Gray 0-3, J. Cambridge 0-3, Martin 0-3, Biriuk 0-3, Kitts 1-2, Todd 1-2, Hobbs 1-1, K. Cambridge 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Kitts, K. Cambridge). Turnovers: 11 (Lemmilä 3, J. Cambridge 3, Kitts, Gray, K. Cambridge, Todd, Watson, Martin). Steals: 27 (K. Cambridge 10, Watson 7, J. Cambridge 4, Kitts 2, Gray 2, Lemmilä, Biriuk). Officials: Mark Berger, Felicia Grinter, Robert Miles. Attendance: 4,672							

shooting night. They made just 4 of 23 three-point shots (17.4 percent) in the win, but they made up for it on the defensive end. Ohio State had 27 total steals in the game, breaking a program record of 25 set in a 99-43 win over McNeese State in 2022.

The Buckeyes found themselves in a huge hole early against the Norse in front of 4,672 in Value City Arena. Failing to play with its usual high level of defensive intensity, Ohio State allowed Northern Kentucky to make eight of its first 12 shots to take a 19-7 lead at the first media timeout.

The Buckeyes played much better after the brief stoppage in play and scored the next eight points to cut Northern Kentucky's lead to four.

The Norse snapped Ohio State's 8-0 scoring run with a three-point jumper by Anna Hamilton, but Ohio State scored the last five points of the quarter to make the score 22-20 heading into the second quarter.

The Buckeyes got out to a cold shooting start in the second quarter and missed their first nine field-goal attempts but played well enough defensively to hang around with the Norse.

Eventually, Ohio State took its first lead of the game at the 5:11 mark when Jalonni Cambridge knocked down a pair of free throws. Ohio State's lead grew to three less than two minutes later after Lemmilä made a jumper to make it 31-28. However, North-

Ohio State 85, Toledo 60							
Dec. 14, 2025							
Value City Arena • Columbus							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Toledo (3-5)	20	13	14	13	60		
Ohio State (9-1)	17	20	22	26	85		
Toledo	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Cole	22	2-4	0-0	0-1	1	0	4
Diala	23	3-6	2-3	3-4	2	1	8
Fedd-Robinson	27	4-8	0-0	0-4	3	4	8
Carruthers	33	1-9	2-2	0-5	4	0	5
Anumgba	24	4-6	4-4	0-1	2	3	13
Weaver	29	7-10	3-4	0-0	0	2	21
Carrier	11	0-1	1-2	0-3	0	4	1
Hocevar	11	0-1	0-0	0-3	0	0	0
C. Dykstra	10	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Puot	6	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	2	0
Braden	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
E. Dykstra	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	21-46	12-15	6-26	12	17	60
Percentages: FG: 45.7%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 6-14 (Weaver 4-6, Carruthers 1-3, Anumgba 1-1, Cole 0-1, Fedd-Robinson 0-1, Hocevar 0-1, Braden 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 1 (Carruthers). Turnovers: 31 (Carruthers 8, Weaver 5, Anumgba 4, Fedd-Robinson 4, Cole 3, Carrier 2, Hocevar, C. Dykstra, Puot, Braden, Team). Steals: 6 (Carruthers 2, Diala, Fedd-Robinson, Anumgba, Weaver).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	21	3-9	1-2	5-8	0	1	7
Gray	26	7-12	1-3	0-0	2	0	15
K. Cambridge	28	10-15	3-4	2-2	1	3	23
Todd	22	4-5	2-2	1-0	1	1	10
J. Cambridge	30	5-13	1-1	1-2	8	2	12
Lemmilä	14	1-1	0-0	1-3	1	2	2
Watson	21	3-8	0-0	0-1	1	2	8
Martin	17	1-5	0-0	0-2	0	1	2
Hobbs	10	1-3	0-0	2-1	1	1	2
Biriuk	6	1-2	2-2	0-0	1	0	4
Henry	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Totals	200	36-73	10-14	14-20	16	14	85
Percentages: FG: 49.3%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 3-15 (Watson 2-4, J. Cambridge 1-3, Martin 0-3, Gray 0-2, K. Cambridge 0-2, Hobbs 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (K. Cambridge, J. Cambridge, Watson). Turnovers: 12 (J. Cambridge 3, Watson 3, K. Cambridge 2, Kitts, Gray, Todd, Lemmilä). Steals: 27 (K. Cambridge 4, J. Cambridge 4, Kitts 2, Todd 2, Lemmilä 2, Watson 2, Martin 2, Gray, Hobbs). Officials: Angela Enlund, Jamie Broderick, Kalei Enterline. Attendance: 5,652							

ern Kentucky responded with a 15-5 run to jump in front 43-36 with 30 seconds before the break.

Cambridge made a layup right before halftime, but the Buckeyes still trailed by five as both teams headed to the locker rooms.

McGuff said after the game that his message to the team at halftime was simple.

"We have to play," McGuff said. "Our effort, intensity and focus were bad in the first half, really bad. We're not going to win if we play like that, clearly. In the second half, we played like we're supposed to play."

After Northern Kentucky made a couple of free throws to open the third quarter, Ohio State flipped the momentum of the game. The Buckeyes went on a 16-0 scoring run to take a 54-45 lead. Northern Kentucky's Mia Jordan ended her team's drought with a layup with 6:09 to go in the third quarter before Watson hit the team's second three-pointer of the game on the next possession. The team had been 1 for 13 from long range before that make.

After her three-pointer, Watson helped Ohio State extend its lead to 16 at the end of the third quarter, 68-52, by scoring four more points.

Ohio State punctuated its win with a dominant 26-10 fourth quarter. The Buckeyes used a 16-0 run over the middle of the period to take a 90-57 lead. That dominant stretch

gave McGuff a chance to play his younger players, who helped solidify the 32-point win.

In addition to leading the team in points, Jalonni Cambridge also grabbed a team-high six rebounds. Watson (13 points) and Kitts (11) also reached double figures. Kennedy Cambridge scored only six points in Ohio State's win, but she also had game-high totals of 10 steals and five assists. Her 10 steals were not only a career high but tied for the third most in a single game in program history.

Ohio State shot 33 of 76 from the field (43.4 percent), while Northern Kentucky was 22 of 49 shooting (44.9 percent) and 7 of 23 from three-point range (30.4 percent).

Northern Kentucky was led by freshman guard Karina Bystry, who scored 21 points and shot 7 of 8 from the field.

Cambridge Scores 23 In Win Over Toledo

Led by Kennedy Cambridge, who scored a career-high 23 points, Ohio State (9-1) defeated Toledo (3-5) 85-60 in front of 5,562 fans at Value City Arena on Dec. 14.

The Buckeyes struggled shooting from beyond the arc and converted only 3 of 15 three-point attempts (20.0 percent), but they grabbed 14 offensive rebounds and forced 31 turnovers. Although they won the game, the Buckeyes still struggled in the first half, outscoring Toledo only 37-33 in the frame.

After the game, McGuff was somewhat unsatisfied with his team's inability to play well for the full 40 minutes.

"I think we were a little better than the last game (a 94-62 win against Northern Kentucky), but that's not hard to do," McGuff said. "Everybody, whether you're on the bench or on the floor, has to show up to be ready to do your job and to really impose how we want to play a game from the tip. And we really haven't done that in the last couple games."

It was a back-and-forth first quarter between the Rockets and Buckeyes. Kennedy Cambridge scored the Buckeyes' first four points, and they grabbed a 4-3 lead just under two minutes into the first quarter.

Toledo scored four straight points to lead 7-4, but Ohio State went in front when Jalonni Cambridge drained a three-pointer at the 4:04 mark to make it 11-10. Ohio State's lead was as large as three in the first quarter, after senior guard Chance Gray made a layup with 38 seconds left to make it 17-14. However, Toledo scored the last six points of the first quarter to take a 20-17 lead.

Toledo extended its lead with a layup to start the second quarter, but Ohio State went on an 11-0 run to go back in front 28-22.

Toledo responded by scoring five straight points and tied the game at 31 with 1:52 left in the half on a free throw by Miriam Diala.

The Buckeyes took a 37-33 lead into the locker room after redshirt-freshman center Ella Hobbs and Kitts each made second-chance baskets in the final 20 seconds of the quarter.

Toledo guard Patricia Anumgba converted a three-point play to start the second half, and Ohio State's lead remained narrow until the Buckeyes went on an 11-1 run during the middle of the third quarter. The run, fueled by a pair of layups from Kennedy Cambridge, made the score 56-43 in favor of Ohio State with 2:14 to play in the third. Ohio State led

59-47 at the end of the stanza.

Toledo scored the first two points of the fourth quarter on free throws by Ella Weaver, but Ohio State went on an 11-2 run to extend its lead to 70-51 with 7:41 remaining in the game.

After Toledo made a basket, Ohio State went on an 8-0 run, making it 78-53 with 4:48 to play, which allowed McGuff to rest his starters at the end of the fourth quarter. The Buckeyes played well enough with several young players on the floor in the final few minutes to secure the 25-point victory.

Kennedy Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer in the win with her 23 points, but Gray (15 points), Jalonni Cambridge (12 points) and Todd (10 points) each reached double figures. Jalonni Cambridge had a game-high eight

assists, while Kitts had a game-high total of 13 rebounds. Ohio State shot 36 of 73 from the field (49.3 percent) and held Toledo to 21-of-46 shooting (45.7 percent).

Toledo was led by Weaver in the loss. Weaver scored 21 points and shot 7 of 10 from the field.

Ohio State will play seven games before BSB next goes to press. The Buckeyes will host two more mid-major teams, Norfolk State and Western Michigan, on Dec. 18 and Dec. 22, respectively. Both of those games will be played at 6:30 p.m. and will be streamed on B1G Plus. The Buckeyes will end their homestand with a huge matchup against No. 4 UCLA on Dec. 28 (2 p.m., BTN).

Ohio State will then travel to West Lafayette, Ind., to take on Purdue on New Year's Eve (12:30 p.m., BTN), before facing Rutgers at home on Jan. 4 (2 p.m., BTN). McGuff's squad will go back on the road to face Illinois on Jan. 7 (7 p.m., B1G Plus) and will wrap up the stretch with a matchup against No. 7 Maryland on Jan. 11 (4 p.m., Peacock).



Kennedy Cambridge

Thornton Goes Off For 24 In 1st Half Vs. Illini

Ohio State might have lost its Big Ten home opener against Illinois on Dec. 9, but it wasn't due to a lack of trying from senior guard Bruce Thornton. In the first half of the 88-80 loss to the Fighting Illini, Thornton scored 24 points, keeping Ohio State in the contest despite Illinois having the chance to pull away often.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

Thornton made his first nine shots of the game, which included six three-pointers, and finished the half shooting 9 of 10 after the senior missed for the first time with just under four minutes remaining in the frame.

The rest of the Buckeyes who played in the first half made just 6 of 21 shots (28.6 percent).

Thornton added three rebounds and three assists in the half and finished the game with 34 points, six assists and six boards.

But he didn't care much about how well he played after the game, since it wasn't enough to carry his team to its second Big Ten win of the season.

"It's just the work I put in that you see every day," Thornton said. "But it really doesn't matter. We didn't win. So all of that can get thrown out the window. What I did was OK, but it wasn't good enough to win."

Illinois was able to keep Thornton in check somewhat in the second half after approaching him a little differently defensively, according to head coach Jake Diebler.

"They put a little more size on him," Diebler said. "A couple of his looks were really good. We tried to get him the ball in different spots, and he's got to continue to be really aggressive because he had it going, there's no question about that."

But in a game in which Ohio State was fouled 21 times, with 48 fouls called total, Thornton got to the line once and shot just two free throws, making both.

Given how often Thornton was shooting and how aggressive he was in trying to get to the rim at times, Diebler was surprised when he looked at the stat sheet and saw that the senior had shot only two free throws in the game.

"I thought him only getting to the foul line one time – something's not right about



SONNY BROCKWAY

BRUCE ON THE LOOSE — Senior guard Bruce Thornton did his best to derail one of the best teams in the country when he scored 34 points with six rebounds and six assists in the 88-80 loss to No. 13 Illinois on Dec. 9. He was nearly perfect in the first half, making his first nine shots, including six three-pointers, before a miss for 24 points in the frame.

that," Diebler said. "I've got to go back and look at why that is in a game where there's 48 fouls called. With the physicality he's guarded with, it's very surprising that a player of that caliber gets to the free-throw line one time and gets two attempts."

"Some of that could be him, and he's got to initiate more contact. It felt like those types of plays were being honored tonight, where offense initiated contact. But he had

34, six and six, so I don't know what there is to really pick at aside from him not getting to the free-throw line when it seemed like a lot of free throws were being had."

Big Ten Play Starts

Before falling to Illinois, Ohio State began Big Ten play against Northwestern on the road. The Buckeyes were able to beat the Wildcats 86-82 in Evanston, Ill., with senior forward Brandon Noel having his best performance of the season to open the conference schedule with a win.

Noel scored 29 points in the victory, which was the second-highest total of his career, trailing only a 32-point performance on Jan. 12, 2023, against Green Bay when he was a freshman at Wright State.

As is usually the case, most of Noel's production came in the paint, and so did much of the production from the entire Buckeye roster during the game. Ohio State outscored the Wildcats in the paint

62-38 and took only 14 shots from beyond the arc, making four of them (28.6 percent).

Diebler said that going into the game, the plan was to attack Northwestern inside as much as they had the opportunity to, and they were successful in doing so.

"We felt like, going into the game, that the paint real estate was the game on both sides of the ball," Diebler said. "For us, it was about attacking, getting there and playing with great poise. Don't force up tough shots and get them in rotation. We didn't want to settle for a bunch of jump shots on the perimeter."

Just three days later against the Fighting Illini, Ohio State lost its second game of the season. Diebler feels it was a winnable game and that it's a contest that they will need to look back at so that they can learn from the mistakes they made.

"We've got to dissect this and learn from it and certainly duplicate the stretches that were really good. We need more of those," Diebler said. "We've got to clean up some of those self-inflicted wounds that really good teams make you pay for every time."

The Buckeye head coach looked at shot selection as the biggest reason that the Buckeyes struggled in the loss, especially in the first half.

"There were multiple times when we battled back and tied it or made it a one-possession game either way, and the following multiple offensive possessions were not good enough," Diebler said. "We value shot quality at an extremely high level as a team this year. Tonight, we didn't do that well enough, and it wasn't just once. It was multiple stretches."

"There were like four straight possessions where we took tough shots and didn't touch the paint. That's not who we are. That's the type of learning we have to do. I love our guys playing aggressive and confident, but we have to play with more poise in those stretches."

Bynum Surging For Buckeyes

Very quickly in his first season with the Buckeyes, freshman forward Amare Bynum has become an important part of the lineup. In the two games before BSB went to press, it was obvious that Bynum's time on the floor was increasing.

Noel has started every game this season, but Bynum has been cutting into his playing time, with the freshman earning 21 minutes against the Illini while Noel also had 21. Then, against West Virginia, Bynum was a major part of the comeback, 89-88, double-overtime win.

Bynum played for over 38 minutes compared to Noel being in for under 17.

In the game against Illinois, Bynum struggled some, scoring just two points on 1-of-2 shooting, while adding just one rebound and fouling out late in the game. His two points were the only two points off the bench for the Buckeyes.

After the game, Diebler acknowledged the struggles that Bynum had against the then-No. 13 team in the country, but he also reiterated the belief he has in the freshman.

"I think he's ready to handle it," Diebler



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said. "He didn't necessarily play like it to-night, but he's a young player who's getting better every single day. He's played pretty consistently for us lately. I don't know if it was the foul trouble that maybe took him out of a rhythm."

Bynum (6-8) has been one of the top rebounders for the Buckeyes when he's in the game as well. With 44 boards through 10 games, he trails just senior center Christoph Tilly (59 rebounds), junior forward Devin Royal (51), Thornton (50) and Noel (47), each of whom has played in more minutes than Bynum.

So when he pulled down just one rebound against Illinois, it was out of the ordinary. Diebler expressed the belief that the freshman would learn from the game and improve himself.

"If he plays 20 minutes, I could almost guarantee that he would be active on the offensive glass, but he just couldn't quite come up with one or two of those," Diebler said. "Knowing him, he's going to take a really hard look at the film and come out and have a great practice the next day because that's who he is."

Four days later, against West Virginia – which entered the game as the No. 3 scoring defense in the country, giving up just 58.4 points per game – Bynum played the best game of his young college career.

He scored 17 points on 7-of-11 shooting and added nine rebounds, three assists and three blocks. He was a major factor in the second-half comeback for the Buckeyes, scoring 13 points in the frame and playing strong defense.

"I saw I had a mismatch, so I just went into the paint," Bynum said after the game. "I just kept being aggressive and kept scoring, and I bring energy. That's what I do."

Thornton was also a major part of the comeback, taking over in the two overtime periods, and after the game, Diebler compared Bynum to how Thornton operated as a freshman during the 2022-23 season.

"I see a lot of similarities in the way that he approaches the game every single day to how (Thornton) did as a freshman," Diebler said. "That's why you're seeing (Bynum) play at a higher level with more consistency, because he shows up every single day and all he cares about is getting better and helping Ohio State win."

"With that approach and that mentality, that's how young players are so impactful. When you walk into our gym, you can't tell if he had 50 points or if he had zero points, or if he played 40 minutes or played none. He just shows up every single day."

Bynum was scoring 8.4 points per game, with 4.4 rebounds, and was tied for the team lead in blocks with Tilly (six), all of which could continue to improve if his playing time continues to go up.

Royal Still Adjusting To New Spot

Diebler made much about Royal's position change this season in an effort to make the Buckeyes' lineup bigger, partly to improve rebounding.

So far, Royal's numbers are slightly down at his new position, despite the majority of Ohio State's games coming against low-major competition. Last season, he averaged 13.7 points per game and 6.9 rebounds – which led the team – while this year he is scoring 13.3 points and

bringing down 5.7 rebounds.

After the game against Illinois, in which Royal scored 15 and brought down three rebounds, Illini head coach Brad Underwood remembered how much trouble Royal gave his team last season when he was at power forward.

"He was a pain in the butt as a four-man to be very honest," Underwood said after the game. "He caused us some problems last year."

In the 87-79 OSU loss on Feb. 2 last season, Royal led the team with 29 points and brought down seven rebounds.

This season, Underwood felt like the Illini could hold Royal in check, which they were mostly able to do in the game, keeping him to 4-of-15 shooting.

"We felt like if he went to some post-ups against us, we had enough size and could crowd the paint a little bit," Underwood said. "We were concerned about him shooting 44 percent from three and not giving him clean looks. We wanted them all to be hard and contested. We felt like that was a good matchup for us."

Even though Royal is second on the team in rebounds this season despite sitting out a game due to injury, Diebler is hoping to see more improvement from the junior in that aspect.

"You've got to maximize that motor when the shot goes up, and you've got to fly in there," Diebler said. "It's an area for him that he's got to get better at quickly. It takes great motor to be an elite offensive rebounder from the perimeter. He can do it. He's shown an ability to do it really, really well, but that's the biggest thing for him."

Royal is aware of that and is trying to get on the offensive glass more often, saying it has taken some work for him to get used to where he is on the court when a shot goes up.

"Usually when I'm down, I can turn around, and they're right there hitting me," Royal said. "I've got to turn my head quicker and go pursue instead of just standing there. It's been an adjustment, but we're working on it every single day. I'm confident."

Ojianwuna Could Still Play

While the status of senior forward Josh Ojianwuna for the remainder of the season is still uncertain, Diebler gave a small update on the former Baylor transfer on Dec. 12, the day before Ohio State matched up against West Virginia.

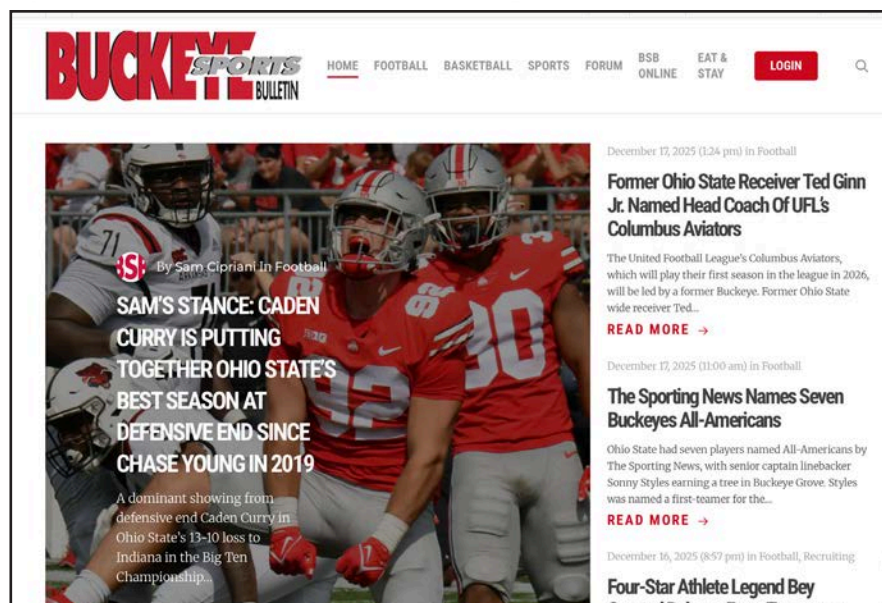
"The door hasn't been closed," said Diebler when asked whether Ojianwuna will play this season. "He's doing stuff on the court now, which is progress, but it's getting to that point where you've got to make a decision."

So there is still a small chance that the senior is able to get on the floor to help the Buckeyes this year, but he also has the chance to redshirt and come back next season.

If nothing else, Ojianwuna would be able to add more of a rebounding presence for the Buckeyes. In his junior season with the Bears, he averaged 6.4 boards per game in 23 games, all starts, before he was injured.

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OSU Takes Two Of Three, B1G Play Begins

By **GREG WILSON**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State played in three games since BSB last went to press, starting that stretch off with a road win over Northwestern, which the Buckeyes followed with a home loss to No. 13 Illinois three days later.

Then, when Ohio State played in the Cleveland Hoops Showdown against West Virginia, it needed a second-half comeback and two overtimes to come out on top against the Mountaineers.

Bucks Win First B1G Battle

Ohio State earned its first conference win of the season on Dec. 6, taking down Northwestern on the road behind 29 points from senior forward Brandon Noel.

“I’m really proud of Brandon,” said head coach Jake Diebler. “The way he practiced this week, you just knew he was going to play well because he earned the right to play well. We played him a little bit more at the center position, and that helped some, but getting active on the glass and getting easy looks in transition unlocked the rest of the game for him.”

The Buckeyes (7-1, 1-0) defeated the Wildcats (5-4, 0-2), 86-82, in front of 5,448 fans at Welsh-Ryan Arena in Evanston, Ill., just over a week after falling to Pittsburgh on a last-second shot. OSU avoided suffer-

ing that same fate by securing the win at the free-throw line, making 5 of 8 shots from the charity stripe in the final minute of the contest.

The game remained within one possession for the first 4:01 before Northwestern’s Nick Martinelli made a second-chance layup to go up 11-7.

The Wildcats stretched that lead to six points on a fastbreak dunk by Martinelli at 13:59, 19-13, but the Buckeyes stormed back with seven straight points to take a 20-19 lead on a floater made by sophomore forward Colin White.

OSU took its own six-point lead, 27-21, at 10:03 on a turnaround jumper by freshman forward Amare Bynum, but from there, the Wildcats slowly chipped away at that lead.

They tied the game up at 38 with 2:18 left in the first half on a three-pointer from K.J. Windham. From there, the Buckeyes managed just two more points on a Bynum dunk, while Northwestern scored six to take a 44-40 lead into the locker room thanks to another three from Windham.

Northwestern took the biggest lead of the game to that point just 1:11 into the second half, going up 48-40 on a dunk from Angelo Ciaravino. The Wildcats were able to hold on to that lead for a few minutes and got it to nine points on a three-pointer by Jayden Reid at 15:05 to make the score 57-48.

From there, it was the Buckeyes’ turn to chip away at the deficit, taking the lead at 62-61 after a 14-4 run that was completed by a Noel layup at 10:23. They never gave the lead back.

The Wildcats came close to pulling off a late comeback when Martinelli made two free throws to bring the score to 82-81 with just 28 seconds remaining in the contest, but senior guard Bruce Thornton and senior center Christoph Tilly combined to go 4 of 6 at the free-throw line before Martinelli had one last free throw with two seconds remaining to get to the final score of 86-82.

Ohio State was led by Noel’s 29 points, 19 of which came in the second half. He shot 13 of 15 from the field and also finished the game with a team-leading seven boards. Thornton finished with 17 points and 10 assists, his second straight double-double, while Bynum (11) and junior forward Devin Royal (10) both reach double figures as well.

Of the Buckeyes’ 86 points, 62 came in the paint, compared to 38 in the paint for the Wildcats.

Martinelli had a game-high 32 points on 10-of-16 shooting, adding eight rebounds and four assists to the box score. Arrinten Page scored 13 points and had a game-high nine rebounds with five assists.

OSU Drops B1G Home Opener

Ohio State (7-2, 1-1) lost its Big Ten home opener, 88-80, to No. 13 Illinois (8-2, 1-0) on Dec. 9 at Value City Arena despite a 34-point performance by Thornton.

Thornton started a perfect 9 of 9 from the field, including 6 of 6 from beyond the arc, scoring 24 of his points in the first half of the game.

Illinois 88, Ohio State 80							
Dec. 9, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus							
		1	2	F			
Illinois (8-2, 1-0)		48	40	88			
Ohio State (7-2, 1-1)		42	38	80			
Illinois	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mirkovic	32	5-11	8-8	1-8	1	3	22
T. Ivisic	27	2-9	2-2	1-1	2	1	7
Stojakovic	27	5-10	7-7	1-3	1	3	17
Boswell	31	1-4	1-2	3-1	1	4	4
Wagler	39	6-11	8-9	2-0	5	2	23
Humrichous	20	0-2	0-0	0-3	2	3	0
Z. Ivisic	19	4-6	3-4	0-8	0	2	13
Davis	4	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	3	2
Petrovic	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	24-54	29-32	9-28	12	21	88
Percentages: FG: 44.4%. FT: 90.6%. Three-point field goals: 11-27 (T. Ivisic 1-6, Mirkovic 4-5, Wagler 3-5, Z. Ivisic 2-4, Stojakovic 0-3, Boswell 1-2, Humrichous 0-2). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (T. Ivisic, Humrichous, Z. Ivisic). Turnovers: 9 (Stojakovic 3, Mirkovic 2, Wagler 2, Boswell, Petrovic). Steals: 0.							
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Noel	21	2-4	0-0	1-2	1	2	5
Royal	37	4-15	6-6	0-3	1	3	15
Tilly	31	4-10	5-7	2-6	1	5	13
Mobley Jr.	31	4-11	2-6	0-2	1	4	11
Thornton	40	13-17	2-2	1-5	6	1	34
Njegovan	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Bynum	21	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	5	2
White	8	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	0
Cupps	7	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	2	0
Totals	200	28-61	15-21	7-23	11	27	80
Percentages: FG: 45.9%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 9-28 (Thornton 6-9, Royal 1-6, Mobley 1-6, Tilly 0-4, Noel 1-2, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 2 (Tilly, Bynum). Turnovers: 6 (Thornton 2, Noel, Royal, Tilly, Njegovan). Steals: 3 (Thornton 2, Tilly). Officials: Anderson, Carstensen, Comer. Attendance: 9,974.							

Ohio State took an early 5-2 lead on a second-chance layup by Tilly and a three from Thornton, but Illinois scored eight straight to take its first lead of the game and go up 10-5 at 15:06.

After nearly three minutes without a bucket, Thornton drained another three-pointer, and Tilly scored four straight Buckeye points to bring the score to 15-12 Illinois.

The Fighting Illini then tallied three-pointers on 3 of 4 possessions, with



Bruce Thornton
Buckeyes’ deficit to four points, 24-20.

With 6:21 remaining in the half, Thornton made his fifth three-pointer on a step-back to bring Ohio State within two points, 31-29. After two free throws for Illinois, Thornton made another layup and another three to bring himself to 24 points just over 15 minutes into the game and give OSU a 34-33 lead. He didn’t miss his first shot until 3:59.

But Illinois was able to go on an 11-0 run to go up 44-34 with under two minutes to go.

Ohio State 89, West Virginia 88							
Dec. 13, 2025 Rocket Arena • Cleveland							
	1	2	OT	2OT	F		
West Virginia (8-4)	37	31	9	11	88		
Ohio State (8-2)	27	41	9	12	89		
West Virginia	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Lorient	44	7-7	1-2	3-4	4	3	18
Obioha	25	1-3	2-2	3-2	0	3	4
Floyd	40	4-8	4-4	0-5	2	4	14
Huff	39	7-17	5-6	0-1	4	4	24
Eaglestaff	23	1-9	2-4	1-1	3	1	5
Jenkins	10	0-2	2-4	0-1	1	0	2
Moore	41	2-10	10-12	1-7	1	2	14
Fields	27	3-7	0-0	1-3	0	2	7
Thomas	3	0-0	0-0	2-0	0	2	0
Totals	250	25-63	26-34	13-29	15	21	88
Percentages: FG: 39.7%. FT: 76.5%. Three-point field goals: 12-26 (Huff 5-13, Eaglestaff 1-5, Lorient 3-3, Floyd 2-2, Fields 1-2, Moore 0-1). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 5 (Lorient 4, Eaglestaff). Turnovers: 17 (Floyd 4, Moore 4, Huff 3, Lorient 2, Obioha 2, Eaglestaff, Thomas). Steals: 5 (Floyd 2, Lorient, Huff, Eaglestaff).							
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Noel	17	2-7	0-0	0-1	1	1	4
Royal	36	4-11	3-5	7-5	2	5	11
Tilly	42	6-13	2-3	2-9	4	2	14
Mobley Jr.	39	3-10	6-6	0-3	2	4	15
Thornton	49	8-17	6-7	1-2	4	3	23
Bynum	38	7-11	3-3	2-7	3	3	17
Cupps	8	1-1	0-0	0-0	2	2	2
White	16	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	2	0
Chatman	5	1-1	1-1	0-0	0	0	3
Totals	250	32-72	21-25	14-28	19	22	89
Percentages: FG: 44.4%. FT: 84.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-21 (Mobley 3-7, Thornton 1-7, Noel 0-3, Tilly 0-2, Royal 0-1, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Bynum 3, Tilly, Thornton). Turnovers: 12 (Royal 3, Tilly 3, Mobley 2, Bynum 2, Noel, Thornton). Steals: 6 (Royal 2, Mobley, Thornton, Bynum, White). Officials: Dorsey, Greenstein, Johnson. Attendance: 6,465.							

Royal and sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. converted on three-pointers on back-to-back possessions to get back within four points at 1:01. Royal ended the half with a buzzer-beating layup to go into the locker room down 48-42.

Illinois was a perfect 11 of 11 from the free-throw line in the first half, much to the chagrin of Buckeye fans hoping the Illini would miss seven from the charity stripe in the game, which would have given the fans free chicken.

Outside of Thornton’s 9-of-10 shooting, the Buckeyes shot just 6 of 21 from the field in the half (28.6 percent).

The Buckeyes came out hot in the second half, tying the game at 53 on a layup by Thornton just under four minutes into the frame. But the Illini answered by converting an and-one by Andrej Stojakovic to take the lead back.

Tilly got into foul trouble, earning his fourth with exactly 12 minutes to go in the game and getting pulled for sophomore center Ivan Njegovan. Both teams were in the bonus with 11:39 left in the game.

Ohio State went 4:53 without a field goal between a layup from Noel at 14:56 and a jumper from Royal at 10:03. After a Thornton jumper, the score was 66-62 for the visitors.

After that shot, both teams scored only via free throw for the next 3:49, with that stretch ending with a 71-66 score when Stojakovic of the Illini ended that streak with a

jumper.

Illinois was able to take a 78-70 lead at 2:55 on a three from freshman guard Keaton Wagler. With 2:00 left, Tilly brought the Buckeyes within five, 79-74, with two free throws. A Royal layup brought that to three points, 79-76 at 1:19, but after an Illinois timeout, the 7-1 Tomislav Ivisic made a three for the Illini to go up by six.

Thornton turned the ball over with 33 seconds to go, and the Buckeyes were forced to foul, leading to the final eight-point deficit.

"There were some good, tough stretches," Diebler said. "Then there were some stretches where we didn't play with the poise that we needed to. Against a really good team, that's how you come up short."

Thornton's 34 points were a game high and he had six assists and two steals. Royal (15), Tilly (13) and Mobley (11) also reached double digits. The Buckeyes shot 15 of 21 from the free-throw line (71.4 percent) compared to Illinois' 29 of 32 (90.6 percent).

Wagler led the Illini with 23 points, while Mirkovic had 22 points with nine rebounds.

OSU Wins Over WVU In 2OT

Ohio State (8-2) managed a big second-half comeback to force two overtimes against West Virginia (8-4) on Dec. 13. The Buckeyes beat the Mountaineers 89-88 at Rocket Arena in the Cleveland Hoops Showdown.

The Buckeyes were led by Thornton, who needed 40 minutes of game time to get warmed up, and Bynum, who was active on both sides of the ball with 17 points, nine re-

bounds and three blocks. It was Thornton's heroics in double overtime that gave the Buckeyes the win with a jumper with three seconds left in the game.

In a battle between Ohio State's fast-paced play and West Virginia's slow pace, it was the Mountaineers' style that ruled the game early on, with just three total points scored in the first 3:05 of the game on a Jasper Floyd three.

The first frame ended up being one of the worst of the season for Ohio State, with the Buckeyes shooting 9 of 29 as a team, which included 2 of 13 from beyond the arc, while West Virginia was 6 of 12 from deep and led 37-27 at the break.

Ohio State couldn't pick up the pace in the second half and wasn't able to cut into the deficit, with the Mountaineers holding on to a 10-point lead, going up 51-35 just under six minutes into the half.

Despite Royal having four fouls, Diebler elected to get the junior back into the game at 14:08. That move seemed to work for the Buckeyes, scoring six straight points before West Virginia called a timeout in an effort to bring that momentum to a halt with Ohio State down 51-41.

The Buckeyes continued to surge when a Tilly layup was counted due to a goaltend, and Royal made the score 55-52 with 8:09 left with a tip-in off his own miss. Royal's points capped off a 17-4 scoring run for Ohio State.

Thornton had a three-point attempt from the top of the key to try to tie the game up, but his shooting arm was hit on a block attempt by WVU, leading him to miss short. A foul wasn't called on the shot, and Diebler

was charged with a technical foul.

West Virginia scored the next five points from the free-throw line to go up 60-52 before Thornton made a three with 6:52 left.

After another rally, Mobley put the Buckeyes on top for the first time since the score was 19-18. His three-pointer gave them a 68-66 lead with 54 seconds left in regulation. Honor Huff tied the game up with a layup, and though the Buckeyes had multiple chances to make a game-winner, they couldn't, and the game went into overtime tied up at 68.



John Mobley Jr.

Huff and Thornton led their respective teams in overtime, scoring a combined 13 of 18 total points in the first extra period. But Huff missed a layup at the end to head to double overtime.

With 3:45 left in double overtime, Royal fouled out, and White replaced him. Chance Moore made both free throws, and Thornton tied the game up at 79 with two of his own and 3:24 left on the clock.

Jackson Fields took the lead back with a layup, and Thornton tied it back up with a jumper. White had a foul and Floyd made two free throws, but Tilly tied it back up with a dunk, and Thornton made a jumper with 59 seconds left to give OSU an 85-83 lead.

Out of a timeout, Brenen Lorient gave West Virginia a one-point lead with a three-pointer, but Thornton took it right back by making two free throws to go up

87-86 with 26 seconds remaining.

The Mountaineers took the lead on a Huff jumper with 13 seconds left, but Thornton made a jumper in the paint through contact with three seconds left for the win.

"Our guys hung in there and played tough," Diebler said. "We never gave up and kept fighting, and (Bynum) was a big part of that. Every single time he was in the game, he provided a spark for us. Then, obviously (Thornton) – that was an incredible way to help will us to a victory."

Thornton had 23 points in the win – 14 of which came in extra time – on 8-of-17 shooting while Mobley (15), Tilly (14) and Royal (11) each had double-digit points. Both Tilly and Royal had double-doubles with 11 rebounds and 12 rebounds, respectively. Huff led WVU with 24 points, including 11 points in overtime.

Before BSB next goes to press, Ohio State will play six games. That stretch begins with the CBS Sports Classic matchup in Atlanta against North Carolina on Dec. 20 (3 p.m., CBS Sports) before coming back home to host Grambling State on Dec. 23 (2 p.m., BTN).

The Buckeyes then take a break over Christmas before heading to Piscataway, N.J., to play Rutgers on Jan. 2 (8 p.m., Peacock) and then are back at Value City Arena to play Nebraska on Jan. 5 (6:30 p.m., FS1). They finish the stretch with a West Coast road trip to play Oregon on Jan. 8 (10:30 p.m., BTN) and Washington on Jan. 11 (6 p.m., Peacock).

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Icers Close 2025 With Much-Needed Win

Coaches have their creeds to live by.

Ohio State football's Ryan Day has his "middle eight" where he expects his teams to win the final four minutes of the first half and first four of the second half.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Hockey has its principles as well. It's a mortal sin to allow a goal in the final minute of a period or the first 60 seconds of the next one. Conversely, scoring in those segments can provide momentum. In theory, anyway.

On a larger scale, no one wants to head into an open week or midseason break with a loss or losses. That's a no-no.

That's what happened to Ohio State in early November when the Buckeyes had almost two weeks to stew over being swept at home by Penn State.

So when the Buckeyes (6-10-0, 2-6-0 Big Ten), in the throes of a gut-wrenching six-game losing streak, faced another dreaded overtime on Dec. 5 against Minnesota in Value City Arena, the specter of a dour holiday break loomed.

Consider that three of the defeats during the skid were in overtime to drop the OT record to 0-4.

The Buckeyes were also 0-7 in one-goal games and could include the game the previous night in that category with an asterisk after the Golden Gophers scored a pair of empty-net goals in the final 1:21 for a 6-3 win in Value City Arena.

Facing those odds, OSU trailed by a goal late in the rematch, but Adam Eisele tied it 5-5 midway through the third period, and miracle of miracles, freshman Jake Karabela took a pass from senior captain Davis Burnside and ripped a shot at 1:11 of over-

time to send the Buckeyes into the break in a much better mood.

"We talked a lot about it, that we're going to be in a lot of one-goal games and you've got to learn, one, to be in those games and two, win those games and how to play in those games," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said. "You've got to be comfortable. The positive is we're right there, and a few bounces and all of a sudden we're staring at a different record."

Finding Closure

It has been a frustrating season. The bottom may have been reached Nov. 28 and 29 at Arizona State in a nonconference series. The Sun Devils took the opener in overtime, but the Buckeyes were primed for a split with a 3-0 lead in the third period of the second game until Arizona State prevailed in overtime again.

"Every loss feels the same," Burnside said. "Obviously, if you have a three-goal lead, you never want to blow that. Even if you have a one-goal lead, you never want to blow it, but that one stings a little extra, knowing that you had it in hand and you gave it away. When we get a lead, we have to be more comfortable with it."

Junior forward Ryan Gordon said it's hard to pinpoint a common denominator for so many close defeats.

"Each one's probably a little bit different," he said. "But I think the biggest thing for us is just figuring out identity, which we're getting closer to every game. You saw at Arizona State, we're up three going to the third."

"So we're doing the right things. It's just a matter of figuring out our identity as a team and what it takes for us to finish games."

Of the three losses that weren't by a goal, the Buckeyes were blown out once – 8-1 at

Michigan on Nov. 22. The previous night in a 5-2 loss, the score was 2-2 with 11 minutes left before the Wolverines scored three times, including an empty-netter. Then there was the aforementioned 6-3 setback to Minnesota.

Burnside sees a positive in playing so many tight games.

"I think down the road that will be good for our group," he said. "In the moment that's not what you want, but we know what we have in the room and how good we can be."

"One-goal games. It's a pretty good spot to be in if you want a chance to win. Overall, I think it's a good learning experience for us. When we do get into those opportunities, we're still pretty young, we'll know how to close them out."

Rohlik sees the growth possibilities as well.

"There's mistakes within the play that we've got to clean up," he said. "The biggest thing is to be connected. The five guys have got to be connected in everything we do – offense, defense, neutral zone, whatever we're doing, and that gives us our best chance. At times in the game, we're breaking down, and we're not connected, and it ends up in the back of our net."

Overtime games are a crapshoot because they are 3-on-3 play instead of the normal 5-on-5. Finding the right mix can be tricky. Of course, the most skilled offensive players will log ice time, but there should be a defensive presence as well when the opponent has the puck.

"You're always trying to find the right combinations as a coach," Rohlik said. "It's pretty easy to coach after games and say, 'Well, maybe I should have put these guys out,' but you trust the guys you put out there."

"And we talked about that. It's like if it's 5-on-5 or penalty kill or power play, we're putting you out there for a reason. We trust you in that situation."

Gordon is optimistic about a turnaround. "It comes from a belief, knowing what we're capable of," he said. "It's my third year. Our first year, we had a bit of a struggle. My second year, we were really good, and I think just knowing that what we have now is closer to last year than my first year gives me that belief."

"We have a good group here that's capable of winning, and it's just a matter of believing that and sticking with our process. This group works really hard, and just believing in that work and not giving up on it is going to get us wins if we stick with it."

There's Hope

Gordon and others can look back to his freshman year of 2023-24 when the Buckeyes won only one of their first 18 Big Ten games before they swept No. 4 Wisconsin.

They finished the regular season 4-18-2 in the conference and went to the limit to win a Big Ten quarterfinal best-of-three series at Wisconsin before losing to eventual champion Michigan State 2-1 in the semifinals.

"A season can switch just like that," Gordon said. "At any point, you can turn it around with the Big Ten. With the Big Ten being so good, all those teams are ranked so high that any team you're playing is probably in the top 20, which really helps."

Rohlik mentioned the 2023-24 season to the players.

"Of course, and that's what you hang your hat on, he said. "We believe that as a coaching staff, when everything's so razor sharp between winning and losing, you've got to keep grinding and find that hot button that helps us get over the edge. What does one win mean for us? Well, can you get one, two wins, and that confidence and a little bit of that swagger?"

There's another, more recent out-house-to-penthouse story that Rohlik cites. When the Buckeyes swept Penn State at Value City Arena the first weekend of December 2024, the Nittany Lions left Columbus with a 6-9-0 overall record, 0-8-0 in the Big Ten.

Penn State came back from the break and finished the season 22-14-4 and 9-11-4. Like the Buckeyes, the Nittany Lions earned a bid to the NCAA tournament. While OSU lost in the first round, Penn State reached the Frozen Four for the first time.

"Those are things that can happen if you believe," Rohlik said. "That's what I believe in every day, and that's what our guys have to believe in because it's the only thing you can look at when you're trying to get better."

"How do you get better? It's got to be a collective. It starts with the five guys that are on the ice together, the 26 total guys we have. That's how you do it. You don't do it as one or two. You can never win in hockey with one or two. You've got to win with everybody. That's how we've always done it here."

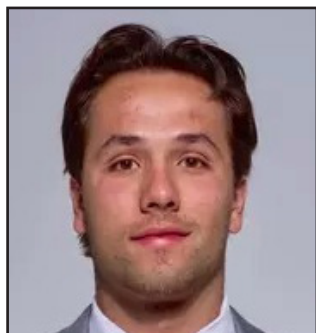
Relief

In the series against Minnesota (8-10-1, 4-4-0), the Golden Gophers led 3-1 in the second period before Félix Caron scored and Max Montes tallied his second of the game in the third period to tie in front of a



Davis Burnside

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Graduate Forward
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crowd of 4,297. Unfortunately for OSU, the Golden Gophers regained the momentum with the go-ahead goal soon after.

The next night, Karabela had a career-high three points with a goal and two assists, Caron and Burnside each had a goal and an assist, and Montes and Broten Sabo both contributed two helpers, with 4,484 in attendance.

Montes, a junior, was named the Big Ten's second star of the week for his two goals and two assists in the two games.

He gave OSU a 1-0 lead in the first game while the teams played 4-on-4. Minnesota countered with three goals in a six-minute span, but Caron scored from the high slot at 13:24 of the middle stanza, and Montes finished a setup by Chris Able at 4:52 of the third for the equalizer. Brody Lamb made it 4-3 for the Gophers at 6:40, and the two empty-netters sealed their win.

Kristoffer Eberly made 22 saves for OSU, which was 2 for 3 on the penalty kill and did not have a power play.

In the rematch, Caron opened with a power-play goal at 9:38 of the first, assisted by Karabela and Montes. Minnesota scored the next two in the see-saw game.

James Hong brought the Buckeyes level at 2:06 of the second with a slick wrap-around. The Gophers then scored on the power play, but Burnside at 13:22 and Nathan McBrayer at 17:01 allowed OSU to carry a 4-3 lead into the third, only to see Minnesota score twice to take a 5-4 advantage.

Eisele tied it at 9:23 of the third. It stayed that way until Sabo in OT left the puck for Burnside, who carried deep on the rush, then fed Karabela a cross-seam pass to the left circle for a shot that hit the post on the way in.

Eberly made 14 saves, and the Buckeyes were 2 for 3 with the man advantage and 0 for 1 on the kill.

Karabela has a team-high 11 assists, and his 14 points are tied for the most with Caron (seven goals, seven assists). Eisele leads with eight goals.

Next

The Buckeyes return from the break for a home-and-home nonconference series against Bowling Green. The teams play in Columbus on Jan. 2 (6:30 p.m.) before heading north on Jan. 3 (6:07 p.m.).

Ohio State will be back in Big Ten play, hosting No. 3 Michigan State on Jan. 9 (6:30 p.m.) and 10 (5 p.m.).

Leading The Way

Eisele is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for November after scoring five goals and adding two assists in six games.

The transfer from Minnesota scored once and had an assist at Wisconsin in a 5-1 win on Nov. 14. He scored twice in a 6-5 overtime loss the next night. He had one assist in the series at Michigan on Nov. 21-22 and finished the month with a pair of goals in the 4-3 overtime loss at Arizona State on Nov. 29.

He led the Buckeyes with eight goals.

For a complete recap of the Minnesota series, go to the [BuckeyeSports.com](#) website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (12-1, 9-0)

Aug. 30 TEXAS, W 14-7.

Sept. 6 GRAMBLING STATE, W 70-0; 13 OHIO, W 37-9; 27 at Washington, W 24-6.

Oct. 4 MINNESOTA, W 42-3; 11 at Illinois, W 34-16; 18 at Wisconsin, W 34-0.

Nov. 1 PENN STATE, W 38-14; 8 at Purdue, W 34-10; 15 UCLA, W 48-10; 22 RUTGERS, W 42-9; 29 at Michigan, W 27-9.

Dec. 6 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis vs. Indiana, L 13-10; 31 CFP Quarterfinal at Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas, vs. Miami (Fla.)/Texas A&M.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (8-2, 1-1)

Oct. 26 Ohio (Exh.), W 103-74.

Nov. 3 IU-INDY, W 118-102; 7 PURDUE-FORT WAYNE, W 94-68; 11 APPALACHIAN STATE, W 75-53; 16 NOTRE DAME, W 64-63; 20 WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 91-58; 25 MOUNT ST. MARY'S, W 113-60; 28 at Pittsburgh, L 67-66.

Dec. 6 at Northwestern, W 86-82; 9 ILLINOIS, L 88-80; 13 at Cleveland Hoops Showdown in Cleveland vs. West Virginia, W 89-88; 20 at CBS Sports Classic in Atlanta vs. North Carolina; 23 GRAMBLING STATE.

Jan. 2 at Rutgers; 5 NEBRASKA; 8 at Oregon; 11 at Washington; 17 UCLA; 20 MINNESOTA; 23 at Michigan; 26 PENN STATE; 31 at Wisconsin.

Feb. 5 at Maryland; 8 MICHIGAN; 11 USC; 14 at Nashville Hoops Showdown in Nashville, Tenn., vs. Virginia; 17 WISCONSIN; 22 at Michigan State; 25 at Iowa.

March 1 PURDUE, 4 at Penn State; 7 INDIANA; 10-15 Big Ten Tournament in Chicago.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (9-1, 1-0)

Nov. 9 COPPIN STATE, W 88-59; 13 BELLARMINE, W 90-33; 16 at UConn, L 100-68; 19 KENT STATE, W 88-68; 24 at Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. Belmont, W 68-56; 26 at Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. West Virginia, W 83-81; 30 NIAGARA W, 130-32.

Dec. 7 at Northwestern, W 79-70; 11 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 94-62; 14 TOLEDO, W 85-60; 18 NORFOLK STATE; 22 WESTERN MICHIGAN; 28 UCLA; 31 at Purdue.

Jan. 4 RUTGERS; 7 at Illinois; 11 at Maryland; 14 PENN STATE; 19 at Coretta Scott King Classic in Newark, N.J., vs. TCU; 22 INDIANA; 25 at Iowa; 29 Wisconsin.

Feb. 1 NEBRASKA; 5 at Washington; 8 at Oregon; 15 MARYLAND; 18 at Minnesota; 22 USC; 25 MICHIGAN.

March 1 at Michigan State.

FENCING

Oct. 11 OSU OPEN, NTS; 12 OSU DUALS, Men 4-0, Women 4-0.

Nov. 8-9 OSU ELITE INVITATIONAL,

Men 3-2, Women 4-1; 22-23 Western Invitational at USAF Academy, Colo., Men 5-1; Women 6-1

Jan. 17 St. John's Invitational in Queens, N.Y.; 18 Dave Micahnik Penn Invitational in Philadelphia; 31 Schiller Duals in Evanston, Ill.

Feb. 1 Schiller Duals in Evanston, Ill.; 21-22 CCFC Championships in Granville, Ohio.

March 8 NCAA Midwest Regionals in Cleveland; 19-22 NCAA Championships in South Bend, Ind.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (6-10, 2-6)

Oct. 10-11 NORTHERN MICHIGAN, W 5-2; W 3-1; 17-18 at UConn, L 3-2; W 4-2; 24-25 SACRED HEART, L 2-1 (OT); W 3-0; 30-31 PENN STATE, L 3-2; L 4-3.

Nov. 14-15 at Wisconsin, W 5-1; L 6-5 (OT); 21-22 at Michigan, L 5-2; L 8-1; 28-29 at Arizona State, L 3-2 (OT); L 4-3 (OT).

Dec. 4-5 MINNESOTA, L 6-3; W 6-5 (OT).

Jan. 2 BOWLING GREEN; 3 at Bowling Green; 9-10 MICHIGAN STATE; 23-24 at Notre Dame; 30-31 MICHIGAN.

Feb. 6-7 at Minnesota; 13-14 WISCONSIN; 20-21 at Penn State; 27-28 at Michigan State.

March 5-6 NOTRE DAME; 11-21 Big Ten Tournament.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (15-3-0, 11-3-0)

Oct. 3-4 at Colgate, W 5-3; W 9-4; 10-11 BEMIDJI STATE, W 6-0; W 2-1; 18-19 at Minnesota W 4-1; L 6-3; 24-25 ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-1; W 4-2; 31 at St. Thomas, W 3-2 (OT).

Nov. 1 at St. Thomas, W 8-0; 14-15 MINNESOTA STATE, W 5-2; W 7-3; 21-22 at Minnesota-Duluth, W 3-1; W 4-1; 28 at D1 in DC Tournament in Washington, D.C., vs. Clarkson, W 8-0; 29 at D1 in DC Tournament in Washington, D.C., vs. Colgate, W 5-0.

Dec. 5-6 WISCONSIN, L 2-1; L 6-1.

Jan. 2-3 PENN STATE; 9-10 at St. Cloud State; 16-17 at Minnesota State; 23-24 ST. THOMAS; 30-31 MINNESOTA-DULUTH.

Feb. 7-8 at Wisconsin; 13-14 MINNESOTA; 20-21 at Bemidji State; 27-March 1 WCHA First Round.

MENS SWIM & DIVE (1-1)

Nov. 7-8 Raleigh Rumble in Raleigh, N.C., vs. NC State, L 790.0-485.5; vs. Virginia Tech, W 485.5-429.0; 18-21 OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 3rd/1,745 pts.

Dec. 3-6 US Open at Austin, Texas, NTS.

Jan 17 MICHIGAN; 23-24 Texas Invitational at Austin, Texas; 31 PITTSBURGH.

Feb. 13-15 OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; 25-28 Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wis.

March 8 LAST CHANCE MEET; 9-11 NCAA Zone Diving Championships, TBD; 13-15 CSCAA National Invitational

Championship at Ocala, Fla.; 25-28 NCAA Championships at Atlanta.

WOMENS SWIM & DIVE (1-1)

Nov. 7-8 Raleigh Rumble in Raleigh, N.C., vs. NC State, L 790.0-546.0; vs. Virginia Tech, W 546.0-364.5; 18-21 OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 1st/2,257 pts..

Dec. 3-6 US Open at Austin, Texas, NTS.

Jan 17 MICHIGAN; 23-24 Texas Invitational at Austin, Texas; 31 PITTSBURGH.

Feb. 13-15 OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; 18-21 Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis.

March 8 LAST CHANCE MEET; 9-11 NCAA Zone Diving Championships, TBD; 13-15 CSCAA National Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla.; 18-21 NCAA Championships at Atlanta.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (6-22, 3-17)

Aug. 23 at Kentucky (Exh.); 29 at Canes Classic in Coral Gables, Fla., vs. VCU, L 3-0; 30 at Canes Classic in Coral Gables, Fla., vs. Miami (FL), L 3-0.

Sept. 3 at Miami (OH), W 3-2; 7 FLORIDA, L 3-0; 12 Beaver Creek Invitational in Dayton vs. Ohio, W 3-0; 13 Beaver Creek Invitational in Dayton vs. Wright State, L 3-2; 19 VIRGINIA, L 3-2; 21 TROY, W 3-2; 26 UCLA, L 3-2; 27 USC, L 3-0.

Oct. 3 at Washington, L 3-1; 4 at Oregon, L 3-0; 9 PURDUE, L 3-0; 12 at Minnesota, L 3-0; 17 ILLINOIS, L 3-1; 19 at Indiana, L 3-1; 24 MICHIGAN, L 3-0; 26 PENN STATE, L 3-1; 31 RUTGERS, L 3-0.

Nov. 2 WISCONSIN,, L 3-0; 8 at Maryland. W 3-2; 9 at Rutgers, W 3-2; 14 at Michigan,, L 3-0 16 at Penn State, L 3-2; 21 NORTHWESTERN, L 3-1; 23 MICHIGAN STATE W, 3-1; 28 at Iowa, L 3-1; 29 at Nebraska, L 3-0.

WRESTLING (8-0)

Nov. 2 Clarion Open at Clarion, Pa., NTS; 9 at Tennessee-Chattanooga, W 42-4; 15 National Duals Invitational at Tulsa vs. Wyoming, W 33-6; vs. Minnesota, W 29-6; 16 National Duals Invitational at Tulsa vs. Nebraska, W 33-3; vs. Iowa W 27-12; 20 KENT STATE, W 44-0.

Dec. 3 BELLARMINE, W 41-3; 12 NC STATE, W 26-10; 21 Collegiate Duals at Nashville, Tenn.

Jan. 4 at Oregon State; 11 INDIANA; 23 at Minnesota; 25 at Nebraska; 30 WISCONSIN.

Feb. 1 MICHIGAN; 6 IOWA; 13 at Penn State; 15 at Maryland.

March 7-8 Big Ten Championships at State College, Pa.; 19-21 NCAA Championships at Cleveland.

OSU Beats NC State In Fishback's Return

After spending his first three collegiate seasons with NC State, Ohio State redshirt-junior wrestler Dylan Fishback didn't shy away from the spotlight on Dec. 12, helping the No. 2 Buckeyes secure a 26-10 win over the No. 9 Wolfpack (5-3) in his first matchup against his former team.

ON THE MAT Sam Cipriani

In three years with NC State, Fishback accrued a 46-22 record with NCAA tournament bids in each of his last two seasons. After struggling through a 16-8 redshirt-sophomore campaign, Fishback felt he needed a change of scenery, and the Aurora, Ohio, native decided to transfer back to his home state.

"NC State just wasn't really a good fit anymore for what I was looking for," Fishback told BSB. "Coming to Ohio State has just been awesome. Basically, from the time I took a visit, it was like I pretty much knew this is exactly where I'm supposed to be. I don't want to sound cliché, but it felt like home in a way. I'm from Ohio, but it felt like family pretty much immediately."

Since returning to Ohio, Fishback, who ranks sixth nationally at 184 pounds, has gotten off to a strong start with the Buckeyes. He has posted a 9-2 record with his only two losses coming to No. 1 Angelo Ferrari of Iowa and No. 3 Max McEnelly of Minnesota.

Despite his history with NC State, Fishback felt that the matchup against his former team wouldn't change his approach.

"It's really just another Friday night dual," Fishback said before meeting his former teammates. "It's exciting to be able to wrestle them, but it is a little odd. Ohio

State is my team now. I still talk to some of the guys there, and it's cool. So I think it's going to be exciting for me and really just a great opportunity to compete against a solid team, especially in front of a home crowd."

Prior to the match, head coach Tom Ryan said he spoke to Fishback about keeping himself focused on his own performance, adding that he understood that emotions would be high with a faceoff against his previous team.

"It's another match," Ryan said. "Of course, there's emotion to tie to it, but it's all about execution. I'm sure they're pumping their guy up, 'He's this, and he's that.' I'm sure they're trying to incite some emotions in the guy that's taking his weight now, but he can't get caught up in that. You get caught up in just simply executing, and he needs to just leave the emotion out of it."

Fishback delivered exactly that on the mat, dominating Don Cates 12-1 by major decision, and he wrestled with the composure Ryan hoped for.

He wasn't the only Buckeye to find success against the Wolfpack on Dec. 12. Ohio State defeated NC State in seven out of 10 bouts.

Top-ranked Vincent Robinson gave NC State an early 4-0 lead with a 12-3 major decision win over Ohio State's Brendan McCrone at 125 pounds. However, Ohio State wasn't deterred as each of its next four wrestlers earned victories to give the Buckeyes a 15-4 advantage at the duals' midway point.

The Wolfpack battled back with a win at 165 pounds, with No. 19 Will Denny defeating the Buckeyes' No. 11 Paddy Gallagher 6-5 in a sudden victory period when Gallagher was called for stalling, cutting Ohio State's lead to just eight.

Ohio State then secured a crucial upset victory at 174 pounds, when No. 5 Carson Kharchla defeated No. 3 Matthew Singleton by an 8-4 decision before Fishback and Luke Geog won by major decision at 184 and 197 pounds, respectively.

Ohio State's No. 3 Nick Feldman fell to NC State's No. 2 Isaac Trumble by a 6-1 decision to round out the dual and ultimately finalize the Buckeyes' 26-10 win. The loss was Feldman's (11-1) first of the season.

Ryan Says Heavier Classes Must Improve

Despite Ohio State coming away with a 41-3 win over Bellarmine (2-4) on Dec. 3, Ryan wasn't completely pleased with the Buckeyes' performance.

Coming off a 44-0 thrashing of Kent State (4-3) and a dominant team performance at the National Duals Invitational, Ryan felt Ohio State fell flat at times against the Knights.

Even though Ohio State's performance as a whole was strong, Ryan said he felt the heavier weight classes were an area where the Buckeyes needed to regroup, adding that the high-level competition from the weeks prior led to some stagnancy in his team.

"Up and down for the most part, we gave really good efforts, but I think the upper weights weren't quite as deliberate as we wanted them to be," Ryan said. "There's a way to wrestle, and sometimes with a match like that, when you're coming off a national dual win as a team, super high-level intensity out in Tulsa, and you come back, and it's a little bit of a letdown. Emotionally, it can be more challenging. We just didn't see what we really wanted to see at some of the bigger weight classes."

Ryan expanded on the challenges at the upper weights, emphasizing that heavier weight classes need to bring the same relentless intensity that 141-pounder and two-time national champion Jesse Mendez displayed against Bellarmine.

Despite dealing with an ailment, Mendez continued to battle throughout his match and showed the fight that Ryan said the heavier weights must emulate.

"I thought a couple of weights just didn't increase their fight when they needed to," Ryan said. "Even Jesse wasn't feeling great. He got taken down. He got ridden a little bit, but there was never a moment in the match when any coach or spectator or teammate was watching the match and felt that his level of effort would dip, and it never dipped. He ended up scoring 24 points to end the match. There's just a way to compete, and we've got to get everybody competing that way."

Three Bucks Claim Titles At Kent Open

Ohio State sent eight wrestlers to the Kent State Open on Dec. 7, and three Buckeyes came away with titles at an event that featured wrestlers from 15 different universities.

At 125 pounds, sophomore Vinny Kilkeary dominated with a perfect 4-0 record, including two pins and a major decision. It was a similar result in the 197-pound weight class where junior Seth Shumate also came away with a 4-0 record, winning all four of his bouts by either pin or technical fall.

That type of dominance out of his veterans is exactly what Ryan looks for when sending his more experienced wrestlers to

small tournaments similar to the Kent State Open.

"Sometimes in these open tournaments, you don't see the same level of talent that you're going to see in the national quarter-finals or semifinals," Ryan said. "We want to see dominant performances, and those are all really tough guys that we have in our room that we need them to step in."

Redshirt-freshman Landon Desselle was the third Buckeye to claim a title, also earning a 4-0 record at 157 pounds. Desselle, who has alternated between 157 and 149 pounds throughout his two seasons, claimed his first-ever title via a win over Holden Huhn of Spire Academy by a 3-0 decision after winning by two major decisions and a pin in his first three matches.

Redshirt-freshman e'Than Birden claimed second at 165 pounds, falling to Minnesota's Blaine Brenner by a 5-1 decision in the finals. Fellow 165-pounders redshirt-freshman Patrick Downing and sophomore TJ. Schierl finished 1-2 and 3-2, respectively, both failing to place at their weight.

In the 149-pound weight class, redshirt-freshman Daxton Chase came away with a third-place finish, losing to ultimate champion Jager Eisch of Minnesota, 6-3, in a sudden-victory period, before defeating Golden Gopher Rhett Koenig in the third-place match.

Freshman Carson Mize was the only Buckeye to leave Kent State winless, falling in both of his competitions at the open.

Ryan emphasized the importance of sending his youth to extra competitions, citing that in his experience, the wrestlers who compete the most show the most growth.

"We feel very confident about (our youth) and showing up to these events is critical," Ryan said. "Men that show up to them, they improve. Men that don't show up to them don't improve. That's part of the growth in the sport. But the fact that they're all going to these, we can't force them to go. They're not on our schedule. Anybody that wants to be anybody has to go. So I'm glad they've been going and the guys that wrestle the most improve the most."

What's Next For Grapplers

No. 2 Ohio State (8-0) has a varied schedule ahead following its win over NC State. The Buckeyes will first compete in the 2025 Collegiate Duals on Dec. 21 in Nashville, Tenn. Ohio State is set to face off against No. 29 Little Rock (2-4) at 2 p.m. before the Buckeyes take on No. 3 Iowa State (2-0) at 4 p.m. at the Montgomery Bell Academy.

Following Ohio State's trip to Nashville, it will have two weeks off before it takes on Oregon State (1-0) on Jan. 4 at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis, Ore. For the second dual in a row, a Buckeye transfer will face his former team, when 149-pounder Ethan Stiles returns to his former home to wrestle against the Beavers after spending the 2024-25 season with Oregon State.

A week later, Ohio State will then return home to Columbus to face No. 24 Indiana (5-1) Jan. 11 at the Covelli Center.



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12 Thoughts Ahead Of CFP Quarterfinal

In celebration of the Twelve Days of Christmas, how about a dozen thoughts on football as we await the Buckeyes' national quarterfinal on New Year's Eve?

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

One

Again, the College Football selection committee got it right, this time in slotting the Buckeyes as the No. 2 seed. This serves as a reminder that even if the committee does slip up here and there, in the big picture, it does a far better job than the AP does in ranking schools. Georgia was second and the Buckeyes third after league championship weekend. Look at the season. It's clear the Buckeyes deserved the No. 2 slot, not to mention the only blemish being a nail-biter against the nation's only unbeaten team.

Two

The one place I will quibble a bit with the rankings is keeping Alabama in the playoffs ahead of both Miami and Notre Dame. Did committee members not see the way Alabama finished? 'Bama not only got thrashed by Georgia, 28-7, in the SEC title game, but it clinched a spot to play in that game by hanging on to beat Auburn, 27-20, the week before. Auburn finished the season 5-7. And also on Alabama's resume is a 14-point loss to Florida State, which finished 5-7 as well.

Three

But that's a discussion at the bottom of the selections. The key thing is that the top teams most likely to fight for the national title were all included in the bracket, without debate. In the old days, only two had a chance, then four schools.

Four

What is Ohio State to do about its short-yardage problem? I think most everyone would agree this is the biggest, and perhaps only, issue that needs to be fixed. My suggestion: quit trying to run the ball with multi-tight end sets. It's not working. There's no reason to think at this point that it can be fixed. Try something different. Keep Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith on the field. Spread out the defense, even if you do intend to run. And if a quarterback sneak is in order with a big set, sub Lincoln Kienholz into the game. He's capable. What the Buckeyes are not capable of doing, they've shown, is punching the ball in with any consistency by muscle alone.

Five

Did you get the feeling, like I did in watching the Ohio State-Indiana game, that Fernando Mendoza was clearly a notch above Julian Sayin? Well, upon re-

flection, I think Sayin had the better game – or at least played as well as Mendoza. Sayin was under more pressure most of the night. Yet over the course of the game, Sayin completed a higher percentage of his passes (72.4 percent to 65.2 percent), threw for more yards (258 to 222) and had a nearly identical QB rating (151.6 to 151.9), while each threw one TD pass and one interception.

Six

Two interceptions in the last two games have not shaken my position that Sayin is the most accurate passer I can recall in college football. Why? Even his interceptions have usually been on the money. Let's review his six picks. Against Grambling, he was on target but late on an out pattern at the goal line. Against Ohio University, he threw two INTs. The first one was tipped – maybe an accuracy issue. The second INT against OU was an ill-advised weak pass as he was about to get sacked. The ball never made it out of the backfield, traveling just a yard or two. His fourth interception came on a scramble against Purdue. It probably shouldn't have been thrown, but it's difficult to say whether that pass was inaccurate. Then the last two against Michigan and Indiana were on the money; they were the result of bad reads each time, not bad throws.

Seven

Sayin's future is even brighter than his performance this season. Why? Those interceptions are easier to correct with coaching and experience than it is to develop a quarterback who doesn't have Sayin's arm talent.

Eight

What happened at Michigan involving Sherrone Moore is a sad situation for all involved – his family, the staffer, and even Moore. But on a football point going forward, Michigan just might be better off, being able to reset a program that was struggling to achieve the standards U-M fans expect and wiping the school clean of its head coach being connected to past NCAA violations.

Nine

The Buckeyes would have benefited if the 2024 playoff-bracket rules were still in place this year. Under the old system, Ohio State would have been seeded fifth, as the top four seeds were reserved for conference champions. That means they would have had a home game against 12th-seeded James Madison. Winning that game would have advanced Ohio State to a quarterfinal against the lowest-seeded of the conference champions, 11th-seeded Tulane.

Ten

Much was made of all four teams with byes losing their opening games in last season's playoffs, the question being: Did the time off hurt? I say no. I think it was just a case of the better team winning each of those games – Ohio State over Oregon, Penn State over Boise State, Texas

over Arizona State, and Notre Dame over Georgia. Among the losers, Boise State and Arizona State had received byes by winning lesser conferences.

Eleven

Early-round playoff predictions. Oregon over James Madison, Oklahoma over Alabama, Ole Miss over Tulane, and (in a close call for me), Texas A&M over Miami. Next, in the quarterfinals, Ohio State over Texas A&M, and Indiana over Oklahoma, then two tougher calls. I'll say Ole Miss will edge Georgia, and Oregon over Texas Tech, but those last two thoughts could change after getting a chance to see Ole Miss and Oregon in the first round.

Twelve

It's often been repeated that Ryan Day, Kirby Smart of Georgia and Clem-

son's Dabo Swinney are the only active coaches with national championships. For a different measure, I calculated the school records since Day became the full-time coach of the Buckeyes in 2019. Ohio State (79-11, 87.8 percent) is second behind Georgia (85-10, 89.5 percent). They're followed in the top five by Alabama (79-15, 84.0 percent), Oregon (72-16, 81.8 percent) and Notre Dame (75-17, 81.5 percent). Others in the Big Ten in the top 25 are Michigan at seventh (68-19, 78.2 percent), Penn State at 14th (62-27, 69.7 percent), Iowa at 15th (60-27, 69.0 percent) and Washington at 23rd (55-28, 66.3 percent). At the bottom among 136 schools nationally are Massachusetts (8-68, 10.5 percent) and Akron (16-62, 20.5 percent). Worst in the Big Ten is Purdue, ranking 121st (30-51, 37.0 percent).

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Yule Love Holiday Wish List: Improved O-Line And Run Game

Let me get this out of the way right away.

If you hold Indiana – or any No. 2 team in the country for that matter – to 13 points, you should win the ballgame. No blame to the Ohio State defense for the 13-10 loss to the upstart Hoosiers in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 6. That 13 points was more than 30 points below IU's scoring average at the time, which ranked second in the nation, and the 340 yards given up was more than 140 below the Hoosiers' then fifth-ranked total.

Nor do I blame kicker Jayden Fielding, who missed a chip shot late in the contest that would have tied the game and certainly made things more interesting. But with all the tools that Ohio State has on offense, Fielding should never have been left in that position. Why not win the game with Jeremiah Smith or Carnell Tate or even Bo Jackson, Max Klare or Brandon Inniss?

Ryan Day summed things up fairly well. "We didn't really establish the run," Day said. "They were playing a decent amount of coverage. So when they're playing that much coverage, you should be able to run the football consistently. When you're not converting on third down and you're not scoring in the red zone, that's the story of the game. So, it's a tough lesson to learn, but it's going to get fixed fast."

The problem is that Day seems to have been saying something about getting the red zone offense "fixed fast" all season, and here we are, 13 games into the campaign, and it remains a major Achilles heel.

As for the run game, it doesn't take a Woody Hayes to spot that "58" in the rushing yards column on the stat sheet. Jackson had workmanlike like totals of 17 carries for 83 yards and a 4.9-yard average. But he didn't have the home-run ball that could have given Ohio State the seven points it needed, or at the least changed the momentum of the game. Instead, he ended up with a long of 20, and Isaiah West, the only other running back who carried against the Hoosiers and who has flashed recently, carried just three times for 4 net yards.

Now I'm left wondering about Ohio State's offensive line. Have we been overrating them all season? In addition to blocking for a modest rushing output against IU, the big guys gave up five sacks, nearly doubling the opposition total heading into the game (and also somewhat distorting Ohio State's rushing numbers, though still modest, in the process).

Was Indiana's defensive line, which came into the game ranked third in the country in rushing defense at 79.3 and 14th in sacks, that much better than Ohio State's offensive line? Maybe.

Were we lulled into a false sense of rushing security by the Buckeyes' performances on the ground against teams like Purdue, UCLA and Rutgers – all ranked 109 or worse in rush defense – at the end of the regular season? In fact, was this year's Buckeye team the 2025 version of the 2024 Indiana squad, a product of its schedule? Unlike some, I still believe Texas to be a good football team, but once Penn State suffered its inexplicable collapse, Ohio State's schedule was awfully light (witness the three teams just mentioned).

I'm not trying to be negative here. I have been convinced by the masses – bullied about it actually – that the only thing that matters any more is the playoffs, so Day still has time to fix things. In fact, I thought the whole strategy for the season was to save the wear and tear on the team in preparation for the big games at the end of the year. No need to hold back now.

Once Ohio State ended its losing streak against Michigan – convincingly, I might add – I was satisfied on the regular-season front.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Now it's time to try to make another run at the brass ring.

I have to think the Buckeyes had a little bit of a hangover in the championship game after that emotional win over the Wolverines, and losing the golden boy, offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, to South Florida to be the head coach just days before the game certainly had to have had an effect on the Buckeye offense against IU.

I'm not making excuses. I don't need to because it's all about the playoffs, remember?

I was a little embarrassed about losing to Indiana, but I was over the loss to the Hoosiers almost immediately. In fact, I hurt way more after Darkest Day I and Darkest Day II, losses to the Hoosiers in 1987 and 1988. The loss to Indiana had virtually no effect on the playoff standings of either of the participants, with both teams getting first-round byes, regardless.

Maybe the conference championship meant more to Indiana, because they haven't won one outright since the '40s. But I am actually coming around to the notion that conference championship games are obsolete. For teams that are contending for the national crown, they are just one more game in what is already potentially a lengthy season.

You know how players opt out of playing in bowl games to avoid injury and "prepare for the NFL draft"? If they are contractually allowed – and I have no idea what that situation is – I could see a potential playoff team opting out of their conference championship game. Not only is there the potential for injury, but a team might jeopardize its playoff status by losing what is a fairly meaningless exhibition.

The team that wins the most conference games in the regular season is the conference champ in my book. That worked for more than 100 years. Why must everything change?

And is all change automatically for the better?

How They Rate Them

This is an action-packed issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Not only do we have the usual basketball, women's basketball, hockey and wrestling coverage, but we wrap up the Big Ten championship game and look ahead to the playoff.

This issue also looks at the football recruiting early signing period. This edition of the early signing period had a little more drama than usual, with Hartline taking the South Florida job while Day was trying to get his committed class to put ink to paper. There was some movement among players, and the period stretched on longer than these periods usually do. However, while there was a slight shuffling of faces, the class ended up about the same, quality-wise, as where it started.

And for some Buckeye fans, there's the rub. As the class stands now, with plenty of time left until the traditional signing day in February, Ohio State ranks just outside the magical top five at No. 6, causing some hand wringing among many Buckeye fans.

Recruiting analyst Allen Trieu of 247Sports downplays those concerns.

"I think it's good," Trieu said of the class, "but I know at Ohio State, you expect the top class in the Big Ten and top three classes overall. So this one's No. 6, and that's the funny thing about the standard that's been set at Ohio State. Six seems like a little bit low when

you've been one, two or three, but I still think the class is really, really good."

Fellow analyst Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop also likes the class and offers an interesting take on how classes are evaluated by the so-called experts.

"I like the class a lot, and it's a good example that sometimes recruiting rankings can be a little misleading," Greene said. "Assume a school would take the 12 top quarterbacks, sign them all in one class, and then sign the 12 top middle linebackers in one class, and that would be their class. You would end up with a pretty highly rated class. But did you accomplish anything?"

"There's more to it than that. You've got to have a balanced class, and you can't really skip a position group. You're going to take four or five offensive linemen, and just one quarterback, but you've got to hit all those. So that's what I look at. I look at this class, and I think they hit most of their needs, and it's very balanced. So to me, it's a win, even though it's ranked sixth by 247Sports, which doesn't mean anything to me."

It reminded me how I always believed Jim Tressel was underrated as a recruiter because instead of chasing players based on their number of stars, he was looking for players who fit into his program. That formula didn't always translate into high recruiting rankings, but it did translate into things like championships and wins over Michigan.

Fans of Greene know that he has been on a one-man crusade to get Ohio State to improve its recruiting along the offensive line. He hasn't felt that the Buckeyes have been recruiting up to the standards of the perennial elites (read SEC) in the offensive trenches.

So I took notice when Greene said he liked this offensive line class.

"Sam Greer has a chance to really be special," Greene said. "The athletic ability at his size. I mean, the guy's 6-8, he's over 300 pounds, and he looks lean. He's got a chance to be a superstar. Then Max Riley is just a battler. He's an Austin Siereveld type of guy – the (type of) guy that maybe you think should be an interior player, but then he ends up playing tackle, and he ends up being your best O-lineman. I think Tucker Smith has a chance to be really good. It's a good group."

I wanted to assure BSB readers that this is just our coverage of the early signing period in this issue. Our annual, information-packed, Football Recruiting Wrap-Up will be published at its usual time, after the traditional National Signing Day in February.

Who Has The Better Culture?

There was a quote in the last issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin from Michigan running back Jordan Marshall that I was going to mention in this issue, even before former Wolverine coach Sherrone Moore's latest difficulties. I'm going to run Marshall's words without comment from me.

Coming out of Moeller High School in Cincinnati, Marshall was ranked the No. 78 overall player, the No. 4 running back and the No. 3 player in Ohio. Despite Marshall's Ohio roots, the Cincinnati native ultimately chose Michigan over Ohio State.

When asked why he chose the Wolverines, Marshall took a dig at the Buckeyes. Marshall said that former Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford would have been the reason

he chose Ohio State if he had done so, but he said that the Michigan culture was a big factor in his decision.

"I really liked Tony Alford," Marshall said. "He would probably be one of the reasons that I went there. I didn't like a few other people (at Ohio State), and that's truly why I didn't pick them. I think Coach Alford would tell you the same. He came here, and he sees the best head coach in the Big Ten, in college football, and how he carries himself and how he puts himself over the team. It's all about culture, and that's what I wanted to be around. I didn't want to be around people that were about themselves, and I truly just believe that. That's why Coach Alford came here, too. He knew that he wanted to be around better people."

Now This Is A Bye

With Ohio State receiving a bye in the first round of the College Football Playoff, this is a good time to, as we occasionally do, bring up our one-company effort to encourage people to use the word "bye" properly. This quest was started by the late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsmann, who insisted on the proper use of the word.

Bye is all but universally used these days to denote an off week in sports. The Buckeyes are offering a perfect example of how the word is supposed to be used.

According to Webster's, a bye is "the privilege, granted a contestant in a tournament, with typically an uneven number of contestants, of not being paired with another contestant in the first round."

Minus the "uneven number of contestants" that sounds like Ohio State.

When Webster's defines a bye as an off week, I will accept that. I believe Karen would have too.

BSB Scheduling Notes

If some of you who actually get your BSB in a timely fashion thought this issue came at an odd time, it is because it was mailed on Friday, Dec. 19. We wanted to get as many of the people who received their paper as a holiday gift on the mailing list as possible, and we wanted the latest news about the upcoming playoffs. The mailing date of the next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is always listed in the credit box on page 3 of each issue. In our previous issue, the next mailing date was listed as "the week of Dec. 20." At that point, we had not yet settled on the date we wanted to mail in order to get the best service for our readers.

The next issue of BSB will be mailed on Jan. 13, when we go back to our traditional winter/spring biweekly publishing schedule.

And speaking of holiday gifts, I wanted to remind you about our Holiday Three-For-One special, one of our most popular promotions of each year. Many of you reading this column have signed up, or had someone subscribe you, through this money-saving promotion. Buy a subscription at the regular price and give two gift subscriptions absolutely free.

In these very expensive times, that means spend \$129.95 for your subscription and get \$259.90 in gift subscriptions absolutely free. Show me a better deal! And your Buckeye friends and family will think of you 24 times a year when their BSB arrives. Beats a pair of socks or a bottle of cologne.

We will accept this offer, and any other holiday offer until at least Jan. 31, 2026, and if you ask nicely probably a little bit longer.

For information, give us a call at (614) 486-2202.